LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

PARSHAS VAYECHI

BY

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LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

ESSAYS ON PARSHAS VAYECHI

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Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

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INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Vayechi wa*s taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

"The time of your Redemption has arrived."

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our

understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

The parsha Vayechi is obviously a fundamental parsha because it deals with Jacob's predicting the future Messianic Age.

ESSAY ONE

THE ULTIMATE BLESSING

Our Sages tell us that when truly righteous people pursue a certain goal, it will inevitably be reached.

Jacob's efforts to instill true brotherly love in the DNA of the souls of his children finally paid off in the next generation with Ephraim and Menasheh.

These two symbolize the ideal of King David's statement in his Psalms: "How good and pleasant when brothers dwell together."

There was not a tinge of jealousy or bad feelings toward Ephraim on Menasheh's part; neither did Joseph's brothers harbor any resentment against Joseph for his sons getting an extra tribal portion.

This was a new generation and a new dynamic was established.

ESSAY ONE

THE ULTIMATE BLESSING

A Blessing to All Jewish Children

Before departing from this world, Jacob blessed Joseph and his two sons, Ephraim and Menasheh. When Jacob placed his right hand on the head of the younger son, Ephraim, and his left hand on the head of the older son, Menasheh, Joseph tried to correct his father. Jacob explained that Ephraim, though the younger brother, would be greater than his older sibling, Menasheh.

The Torah then concludes with Jacob's final blessing to them:

> He blessed them on that day saying, "Israel will bless [their children] with you, saying, 'May G-d make you like Ephraim and Menasheh.'" He placed Ephraim before Menasheh."

Since that day, the traditional blessing fathers give their children has been "May G-d make you like Ephraim and Menasheh."

This provokes a question: Since the time of Ephraim and Menasheh, there have been thousands of righteous people, many of whom are regarded as spiritually superior to Ephraim and Menasheh, such as Moses and Aaron. What is it about these two brothers that Jacob wanted all our children to emulate?

Continuing Preferential Treatment?

To answer this question, we must first answer another pressing question. After seeing how preferential treatment of Joseph led to such negative results, why did Jacob do it again with Ephraim and Menasheh by showing favoritism to the younger brother?

Moreover, his elevation of Ephraim and Menasheh, Joseph's sons, to a status equal to that of their uncles, Joseph's other brothers, Jacob conferred a privilege on them that he did not accord to their cousins. This step seemed a repetition of his original mistake of showing preferential treatment to Joseph. Didn't Jacob learn a hard lesson about showing favoritism when he suffered so much precisely from showing preference for Joseph?

In response to this question, we must conclude that Jacob's open display of his greater love for Joseph coupled with sending him to seek out his hostile brothers, was not, G-d forbid, an act of reckless neglect or a lack of common

sense. The Patriarchs are regarded by our Sages as "chariots," meaning that every action of theirs was a natural response to G-d's will, in the way a chariot responds to the will of its driver. Even their "errors" were not examples of human frailty and moral lapses but were well-intentioned and, moreover, orchestrated from Above to teach us important lessons.

Seeing the Present Through the Eyes of the Future

Jacob prophetically saw into the future and knew that the secret of Jewish survival, and what will ultimately end exile, is unity. Indeed, our Sages inform us that the Second Temple was destroyed because of the senseless hatred that prevailed amongst the Jewish people at that time. The way to correct that destructive force, restore the Beis Hamikdash and usher in the Messianic Age is by reversing that jealousy and enmity that brought about the exile in the first place.

Jacob, therefore, may have reasoned that if he could cultivate a lack of jealousy amongst his diverse children, themselves the progenitors of diverse approaches to serving G-d, he would have empowered the future Jewish nation to overcome its harmful divisions.

Jacob wanted to inculcate in them the unconditional love for one another that would be crucial for the future of the

Jewish nation. The real test of that love is demonstrated when another brother—especially if he is younger - is given preference without arousing jealousy. When all are left equal, there is no stress test of their unconditional loyalty and love for one another.

If Jacob "erred," it was that this test of his sons was premature; they were not ready to absorb the lesson. He miscalculated the extent to which his preferential treatment of Joseph would lead to disastrous results. Jacob viewed his sons from his own spiritual vantage point and saw their underlying potential for unity before they were ready for it to be actualized. In other words, Jacob saw them through the eyes of the future and saw how they would ultimately unite.

However, our Sages tell us that when truly righteous people pursue a certain goal, it will inevitably be reached. Jacob's efforts to instill true brotherly love in the DNA of the souls of his children finally paid off in the next generation with Ephraim and Menasheh. These two symbolize the ideal of King David's statement in his Psalms: "How good and pleasant when brothers dwell together." There was not a tinge of jealousy or bad feelings toward Ephraim on Menasheh's part; neither did Joseph's brothers harbor any resentment against Joseph for his sons getting an extra tribal portion. This was a new generation and a new dynamic was established.

After all of the travail that Jacob, Joseph and his brothers had experienced, Jacob felt that they had been purged of their jealousy and were ready for the Messianic Age.

Revealing the End Time

We therefore find later in this parsha, that Jacob tried to reveal the future arrival of Moshiach.

> Jacob called for his sons and said, "Gather around and I will tell you what will happen to you in the End of Days."

The Midrash, cited by Rashi, comments:

> He wanted to reveal the "End" [of days, when Moshiach would come] but the Divine presence departed from him, so he began to speak about other things.

This raises a question. If Jacob knew that Moshiach's coming would be in the distant future, why would he want to burden his sons with the sad news that it would not happen for quite an extended period of time? And why did the Divine presence depart from him at that very moment?

The answer is that his desire to reveal the future Redemption was based on how he saw his sons outgrow their rivalry and jealousy and enter into an unprecedented unified state. He had successfully planted the seeds for the

final Redemption. More specifically, when Jacob saw Menasheh totally accept his secondary status without any trace of jealousy or malice he knew that the potential for correcting jealousy amongst his descendants did in fact exist and he saw the Redemption on the horizon.

But, alas, our Sages continue, "the Divine presence departed from him" and he did not reveal the time for the Final Redemption. What went wrong?

The answer is that, once again, Jacob had viewed the world through **his** prism of being able to see the future in the present. He saw a rehabilitated and united family, devoid of petty jealousy; the ingredients for the Final Redemption. He saw the Redemption unfolding before **his** very eyes.

However, the process of forging unity had to be more than a one generation phenomenon. For the Final Redemption to become a reality, future generations would need to recreate the dynamic that existed in Jacob's final days. The seeds of unity needed to be nurtured. As we know, it turned out to be a long, arduous and rocky road until Jacob's vision could be seen by everyone.

As we stand now, poised on the threshold of the Redemption, we ask ourselves where did this process begin? Where did we derive the power to break out of exile? The answer is that it all began with the lack of

jealousy and brotherly love displayed by Ephraim and Menasheh.

The Vessel for all Blessings

We can now appreciate why the ultimate blessing for our children is to be like Ephraim and Menasheh.

It is true that there are many other Jewish historical figures who rate more prominently than Menasheh and Ephraim, such as Moses and Aaron. Nevertheless, what distinguished Ephraim and Menasheh from all others was their total reversal of the dynamic of division and rivalry that plagued their elders. Moreover, the reversal was as dramatic as it gets. They went from the extreme rivalry of their uncles, which lead them to plot Joseph's murder, to the opposite extreme of harboring not a trifle of envy.

Their ability to reverse course like this made them unique, even in comparison to Moses and Aaron. When G-d chose the younger Moses as the liberator of the Jewish nation, Aaron did not feel envy. On the contrary, G-d told Moses that when Aaron heard that Moses was the chosen one, "he will rejoice in his heart."

Even so, Menasheh and Ephraim stood out for their lack of rivalry immediately after events that represented the zenith

of brotherly division and strife. Their unique contribution is their ability to reverse a negative dynamic.

Jacob, having seen the way Menasheh and Ephraim responded to his preferential treatment of the younger of the two brothers, knew that this would be the ultimate blessing for the future of the entire Jewish nation. He believed that he had finally succeeded in cultivating the unconditional brotherly relationship that would prove crucial for our future. No other blessing could match that of brotherly love, because it is the ultimate vessel for all other blessings.

Peace is the ultimate blessing that makes all the other blessings real and accessible to us, particularly when it follows a time of dissent and discord.

In the eternal words of our Sages, with which they conclude the Mishnah:

"G-d could not find any vessel that contains blessing other than peace."

ESSAY TWO

JACOB AND JOSEPH

For the Jews to have the spiritual capacity to be liberated from Egypt, they needed an "outside" force.

Jacob, in his rightful place - the Holy Land of Israel - served as the reservoir of strength, hope and inspiration for his children.

For the Jews to have the spiritual capacity to cope while they remained in Egyptian bondage, they needed the presence of Joseph, from whom they would draw inspiration and spiritual sustenance.

ESSAY TWO

JACOB AND JOSEPH

Difference between Jacob and Joseph

In this week's Torah portion, Vayechi, Jacob, on his deathbed, makes a last request of his son Joseph. "Bury me not, I pray you, in Egypt!" he implores.

"I will do as you have said," Joseph promises his father.

This exchange between father and son underscores an important difference between Jacob and Joseph:

Jacob refused to be interred in Egypt, insisting that his body be brought back to the land of Israel for burial. Joseph, however, before his death, made the Jews swear they would take his bones back with them to Israel when the time for Redemption came. His casket remained in Egypt for the duration of the exile.

Why didn't Joseph want to be transported back to Israel as did Jacob? Shouldn't Jacob's request not to be buried in

Egypt resonated with Joseph that he too would want to be buried in Israel?

Parallel Approaches

The Rebbe explains that both approaches were necessary.

For the Jews to have the spiritual capacity to be liberated from Egypt, they needed an "outside" force. Jacob, in his rightful place - the Holy Land of Israel - served as the reservoir of strength, hope and inspiration for his children.

For the Jews to have the spiritual capacity to cope while they remained in Egyptian bondage, they needed the presence of Joseph, from whom they would draw inspiration and spiritual sustenance.

Two Sources of Inspiration in Our Day and Age

We are living on the threshold of Galus-exile and Geulah-Redemption.

We too need to draw our inspiration from two sources to help us get over the hump and make the final trek into a world of Moshiach.

The “inside” Galus influence and inspiration comes from our past. As was discussed in many of these essays, we possess the cumulative energy of all preceding generations.

However that influence is behind us; it has already been internalized and lives with us in these last days of Galus. These energies were generated mostly within the confines of our exile experience. This parallels the support the Jewish people received from Joseph.

But we also need to get support from the "outside" source; from the future Redemption that is waiting for us to enter into it; but has so far proven elusive. And although we eagerly await Moshiach's coming every day, it is still difficult to feel the effects of the future; but we must know that it is there. We can enjoy the inspiration of the future even now.

The Light before Sunrise

This has been compared to the dawn of day. Even before the sun rises we can already see the light emerging from the future sun. And it is this light of the future that gives us hope and inspiration; knowing that we will soon cross over into the world of Redemption.

The source of inspiration that comes from the future parallels the inspiration that came from Jacob who was buried in Israel and preceded the Jewish people's entry into their land.

When we reflect on what we have accumulated in Exile through thick and thin and look into the glorious future that awaits us, imminently, we can only be strengthened to practice our Judaism with great joy and optimism.

ESSAY THREE

ALL OF JACOB: NOT JUST MEMORIES

As we stand on the threshold of the "Messianic Age" we must be aware of our role as "Josephs" whose destiny it is to forge ahead into a new world.

To accomplish this, we must be rooted in the past traditions of Judaism.

We must also remember that nice memories of the past do not suffice to guarantee continuity for the future, we must take all of the past with us.

ESSAY THREE

ALL OF JACOB: NOT JUST MEMORIES

Joseph's Oath

Jacob realizes his end is near and summons his son Joseph to his bedside.

> "Swear to me," Jacob says to Joseph, "that you will bury me in Cana'an."

It is remarkable that Joseph's commitment to Jacob that he would take him to Cana'an for burial did not suffice for Jacob. Only a solemn oath would keep Jacob's mind at ease. How could it be, commentators ask in amazement, that Jacob did not trust Joseph? And if Joseph's word was not reliable why would his oath be any better?

Rashi explains that Jacob was concerned that Joseph would be under immense pressure from Pharaoh to keep Jacob's body in Egypt. Only when Joseph told Pharaoh that he was under a solemn oath to his father to take him out of Egypt, would Pharaoh allow it.

Every statement in the Torah was given to instruct us in our own lives. What lesson is there for modern times in the knowledge that Jacob asked not to be buried in Egypt, and that the oath, he demanded of him, was for Pharaoh's sake?

Old versus New

Jacob represents the old tradition of Judaism. Joseph, which means "may he increase," by contrast, refers to the new challenges that face the Jewish nation as they forge ahead.

Joseph thus embodies the increased insight and energy needed to meet the new challenges associated with changing times. New challenges demand increased vigor and more profound approaches.

As one faces challenges of the future ("Joseph"), one faces the danger of breaking away from the ideals of the past ("Jacob"). The need to preserve the past as we enter into the future is underscored in last week's Parsha. When Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers, he exclaims, "I am Joseph, is my father still alive?"

Commentators ask why he asked if his father was still alive? Hadn't he already been told by his brothers that Jacob was indeed alive?

Joseph, one might say, was referring to his role as the one who leads the Jewish nation into the future. "I am Joseph,"

was meant to convey that his soul's purpose was to increase and innovate. But, Joseph also recognized that without his father Jacob's values and inspiration, his role could not be realized. Thus Joseph declares, "I am Joseph, is my father alive?" Are my father's ideals still alive and vibrant, then I am capable of being Joseph.

Joseph's recognition that our ability to forge ahead hinges on our connection to the past, however, did not suffice. Jacob wanted Joseph to realize that he must not bury him in Egypt. It was not enough to merely glean some useful insights from Jacob's life, and then bury him in Egypt, i.e., adapt Jacob's ideals to that of Egypt. It does not suffice to select those aspects of our tradition that inspire us but leave the body of Judaism (Jacob) buried and lost in Egypt. We must carry the totality of Jacob with us, not just some nostalgic memories of him and that which he represents.

Pressure from Pharaoh

Jacob, however, realized that Joseph was under tremendous pressure from Pharaoh, the reigning fads and mores of Egypt, to bury Jacob there. Jacob therefore asked for an oath. An oath is one way of invoking greater Divine assistance in carrying out one's commitments. Thus, Joseph's oath represented an extra measure of Divine assistance he was given to cope with the influences and

pressures of modernity, i.e., Pharaoh that enabled him to take the totality of Jacob out of Egypt

We are the Josephs

As we stand on the threshold of what our sages referred to as the "Messianic Age" or "the Redemption," we must be aware of our role as "Josephs" whose destiny it is to forge ahead into a new world. To accomplish this, we must be rooted in the past traditions of Jacob-Judaism. We must also remember that nice memories of the past do not suffice to guarantee continuity for the future, we must take **all** of Jacob with us. Not one iota of Jacob's ideals must be left behind and buried in Egypt.

And lest we become discouraged because of Pharaoh's – read: modernity's – overbearing influence over us, that tries to smother and bury Jacob, we should know that we were given special Divine assistance, symbolized by the oath administered by Jacob, that will give us the strength to preserver as we meet the new challenges of the Messianic Age.

ESSAY FOUR

RIGHT AND LEFT

No matter how great, glorious and spiritual it was when we had the Holy Temple in Jerusalem; we have now reached even greater heights in exile.

We have thrived and been fruitful in spite of all the obstacles and tribulations that we encountered throughout the last 2,000 years of exile.

Particularly, in the last few decades when we have gone through both the fires of persecution and the temptations of assimilation, have we grown by leaps and bounds.

All of our trials have prepared us for an age, the Messianic age, which will make even the Temple era appear insignificant by comparison.

ESSAY FOUR

RIGHT AND LEFT

Reversal

Joseph brought his two sons Menasheh and Ephraim to be blessed by his dying father Jacob. Jacob placed his right hand on the head of Ephraim and his left hand on the first born Menasheh. When Joseph realized that Jacob had reversed the normal procedure of giving precedence to the older and first born son, he told his father that he had erred and requested of him to put his right hand on the head of Menasheh.

Jacob's response to Joseph was:

> "I know my son, I know, he too will become a people and he too shall become great, however his younger brother will be even greater than him."

In the end, the Torah relates, Jacob prevailed and placed his right hand on the younger son Ephraim.

How do we reconcile Jacob's preference for the younger son with the Torah's general preference for the first born? And what lesson does this episode have for us, inasmuch as

every story in the Torah must serve as an eternal message for all times?

Different Approaches to Exile

Menasheh and Ephraim were not only brothers, sons of Joseph, but they also represent different ideals and approaches to life. And since they were both born in exile – unlike all the other grandchildren of Jacob – they symbolize two different ideals within the context of exile.

When Joseph names his first born, he calls him Menasheh because "G-d has made me forget (*nashani*) all my toil and all my father's house."

Some commentators explain that Joseph was expressing the fact that although living in Egypt would make him forget his father's house; he did not want to do so. Menasheh was Joseph's anchor to the past. Hence the very name Menasheh focused on his relationship with his father's home.

Ephraim, conversely, was so named because "G-d has made me fruitful (*hifrani*) in the land of my affliction." Ephraim does not deal with his past but with the progress he makes in the land of exile.

These two names reflect two attitudes we can take towards exile. The first approach is to work at not being influenced

by this new environment; by not allowing the new circumstances in which we find ourselves to sever our ties with our father's house.

A second approach, however, is to focus attention on what we can accomplish in the land of affliction; to try to make the most of exile; to grow and thrive despite the hardships and obstacles. On the contrary, it is the adversity that elicits a greater measure of positive energy from within.

Both Right

Which of these two approaches is preferable?

The answer is that the first approach (the "Menasheh" approach) is "the first born," i.e., it is the first step and prerequisite towards reaching the second level. Before we can view exile in a positive way and "be fruitful in the land of my affliction," (the "Ephraim approach") one must first make sure that s/he remembers from whence they come. By being anchored to the past, one can become impervious to the negative and alien influences of the exile condition in which one is now situated.

That was Joseph's approach. When one enters into a new and foreign land, one must put all one's efforts – one's right hand – on the head of Menasheh, on the approach of insulating oneself from the hostile influences, by keeping in

touch with one's spiritual past. We should never forget who we are and from where we have come, if we are to survive in exile.

Jacob, however, realized that the goal is not to remain afloat in the turbulent waters of exile. That is not enough. Ultimately one must reach the level of Ephraim; to thrive in exile. There must be an ascent precisely because we have experienced a descent. There is a time when our growth in exile outshines anything that we had when we were still in the security of "our father's" insulated home.

Thus Jacob places his right hand – his stronger hand – on the head of the younger son Ephraim. Even though Ephraim must be preceded by the approach of Menashe – one must have the ability to insulate oneself and be connected to one's past – it is clearly **not** the goal. The goal is to reach a level where one's stay in exile leads one to a level that transcends that of the past.

Thrived in Exile

And indeed, our sages have told us that no matter how great, glorious and spiritual it was, when we had the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, we have now reached even greater heights in exile. We have thrived and been fruitful in spite of all the obstacles and tribulations that we encountered throughout the last 2,000 years of exile.

Particularly, in the last few decades when Jews have gone through both the fires of persecution and the temptations of assimilation, have they grown by leaps and bounds and have prepared themselves and the entire world for an age, the Messianic age, that will make even the Temple era appear insignificant by comparison.

Ultimately it is the Ephraim approach that will be vindicated and become the pre-eminent one.

ESSAY FIVE

MESSIANIC BEAUTY AND HARMONY

Jacob's trait of *tiferes,* translated as beauty or harmony could not degenerate into evil.

When a trait is so nuanced and balanced it leaves no room for degeneration.

G*evurah*-judgment **limits the excessive potential of *chesed*-kindness and, conversely, *chesed* suppresses the explosive potential of *gevurah*.**

***Tiferes* is thus an incorruptible trait. Nothing truly evil or untoward can come out of *tiferes*. While evil can be committed by people notwithstanding their relationship to a *tiferes* personality it is not because of the *tiferes* personality but in spite of that person.**

ESSAY FIVE

MESSIANIC BEAUTY AND HARMONY

Last Will and Criticism?

As Jacob lay "dying," he gathered all of his sons to his bedside and blessed them. In truth, three of his sons, Reuben, Shimon and Levi, were actually censured for their temperament. Rueben was criticized for his impulsiveness and Shimon and Levi for their anger.

In his critical remarks to Shimon and Levi, Jacob stated:

Into their design, may my soul not enter! With their congregation, do not unite, O my honor!

What did Jacob have in mind with these cryptic words?

Rashi explains that the phrase, "Into their design, may my soul not enter" refers to a future incident in the days of Moses. Zimri, a descendant and leader of the tribe of Shimon, consorted with a Midianite princess and brought calamity to his tribe and to the Jewish people. Jacob requested that his name not be mentioned with regard to that matter, thus it was stated, "Zimri son of Salu, leader of

a father's house of Simeonites." It did not write "son of Jacob."

Similarly, Rashi explains that in the phrase, "With their congregation, do not unite, O my honor!" Jacob was alluding to Korach's rebellion against Moses. Korach's genealogy is described thus: "Korach son of Itzhar son of Kehos, son of Levi" It does not say, "son of Jacob."

The Questions

Several questions come to mind:

First, why did Jacob feel compelled to criticize his sons at precisely the moment when he gathered them for his blessings? True, in the end, Rashi states, he included all of his sons in all his blessings. One might further observe that by reprimanding them for their imperfections, Jacob attempted to remove whatever blockages there may have been for his sons to be receptive to his blessings. However, the question still remains, why did he wait for the last moments of his life to remove their imperfections?

Second, why was he so concerned with tracing their names back to him? Would anyone have imputed to him the sins of his descendants?

Third, why was he only concerned with the sins of these two tribes? They were not the only ones to sin.

Fourth, these two sinners can indeed, indirectly, be traced back to Jacob, inasmuch as they are traced back to Shimon and Levi, respectively. Doesn't everyone know that Shimon and Levi were sons of Jacob?

Kindness and Judgment: Double Edged Swords

The key to answering these questions is to first address another question: Why was Jacob more concerned about having his name somehow associated with the sins of his progenies than were Abraham and Isaac? Yishmael is frequently mentioned as the son of Abraham notwithstanding his deviation from Abraham's way of life. Esau was even more corrupt and yet Isaac allowed Esau to be identified with him. Why was Jacob so sensitive about his reprehensible descendants that he chose to distance himself from them in his parting moments from them?

The answer lies in the spiritual differences between Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Chassidic thought explains that Abraham was the personification of the Divine attribute of *chesed*-kindness and love. Isaac, on the other hand, was the embodiment of the trait of *gevurah*-strength, which incorporates awe, judgment and discipline. These traits manifested themselves in the way Abraham and Isaac served G-d and the way they dealt with others. Abraham served G-d with love; Isaac with

awe; Abraham spread his light outward; Isaac turned inward and introspective. Abraham showered hospitality and love; Isaac demanded high standards.

Jacob epitomized the attribute of *tiferes*-beauty or harmony, itself the synthesis of *chesed* and *gevurah*. Jacob inherited his father's and grandfather's traits of *chesed* and *gevurah* and transformed them into a piece of art of many colors. Indeed, Chassidic thought explains that when you combine kindness with judgment the result is *rachamim*-compassion another trait associated with *tiferes*. The reason why it is called beauty is precisely that it is a blend of two distinct colors. It takes many colors to produce a truly exquisitely piece of art. The most beautiful music is produced through a symphony.

The Awesome Power of *Tiferes*

When we delve more deeply into these three attributes, *chesed, gevurah* and *tiferes* we discover that there is far more power inherent in Jacob's trait of *tiferes*. *Chesed* and *gevurah* turn out to be double-edged swords while *tiferes* is pure and pristine.

Chesed and love, Abraham's attributes, and likewise Isaac's attribute of *gevurah*, while positive and holy when they were manifested through Abraham and Isaac, can actually

be the source of negativity as they emerge from their source.

To cite a few examples:

Exaggerated kindness to a child or student can often lead to an atmosphere of permissiveness. Giving alcohol to an alcoholic who pleads for it may outwardly come through as an act of kindness but it is just as negative an act as assaulting that person.

The emotion of love, which motivates acts of kindness, can also lead to immoral behavior.

Indeed, the Talmud states that incest is referred to in the Torah as *chesed*. This is explained in the Talmud by referring to Cain and Abel's incestuous marriage to their twin sisters through which they populated the world; an act ultimately forbidden and regarded as deeply immoral and a heinous crime. Hence, the Talmud says, we can understand what the Psalmist means when he stated "The world was created with *chesed*!"

Chesed is, therefore, necessarily situational. There are times when it is considered to be the most exalted and cherished aspects of human personality and at other times it can mark the nadir of depravity.

The same is true for the attribute of *gevurah* with which Isaac is identified. Harshness and judgment are great when

attenuated and capable of refining the one who is being disciplined but unmoderated it can also lead to anger and unmitigated violence.

Thus, our Sages underscore that Yishmael departed **from** Abraham and Esau departed **from** Isaac. Yishmael personified the *chesed* and love of Abraham but in its degenerate form and Esau was an extension of Isaac's *gevurah* as he sank into violence. While they inherited their fathers' characteristics of *chesed* and *gevurah*, respectively, they channeled them into the realm of evil.

Jacob's trait of *tiferes,* by contrast, could not degenerate into evil. When a trait is so nuanced and balanced it leaves no room for degeneration. G*evurah* limits the excessive potential of *chesed* and, conversely, *chesed* suppresses the explosive potential of *gevurah*. *Tiferes* is thus an incorruptible trait. Nothing truly evil or untoward can come out of *tiferes*. While evil can be committed by people notwithstanding their relationship to a *tiferes* personality it is not **because** of the *tiferes* personality but **in spite** of that person.

Thus the difference between the evil people who descended from Abraham and Isaac and those evil people who emerged from Jacob is that in the former case it was their traits of *chesed* and *gevurah* that went awry whereas in the

latter instance, it was because they strayed from the *tiferes* ideals of Jacob.

"Jacob Did Not Die!"

We can now understand the statement in the Talmud that Jacob did not actually die. What this means on a spiritual level is that while the traits of *chesed* and *gevurah* can experience degradation and degeneration—death in the conceptual sense—Jacob's trait of *tiferes* always remains intact.

This also explains the association made by the Torah of Jacob with truth. Truth in its truest form is the integrity and durability of a thought, deed or concept. Jacob personified this consistency and indeed found immortality.

We can now resolve all of the questions raised above.

The reason Jacob was so concerned with his progeny's evil conduct that he did not want his name associated with them is that he wanted to demonstrate that fidelity to the well balanced trait of *tiferes* does not lead to that evil behavior. Abraham and Isaac, by contrast, could not make that case, because, as explained above, their traits can become the double edged swords that lead to immorality and violence.

That people would know that he was their ancestor did not trouble Jacob. What troubled him is that people would conflate their sins with Jacob's impeccable ideal of *tiferes*, as if *tiferes* was just as vulnerable to distortion as the other traits.

We can now also understand why he was only concerned with the sins of these two tribes. The sins of Shimon dealt with immorality, the trait of *chesed* going awry, while the sin of Korach, who was associated with division and conflict was a manifestation of errant *gevurah*. Jacob wanted it to be crystal clear that their deviations had nothing to do with *tiferes*.

Preparation for Redemption

We can now also understand why he waited until the last moment to criticize his sons.

The Torah tells us that Jacob's gathering of his sons was related to the future coming of Moshiach. All of the symptoms of exile, which brought physical and spiritual death and destruction to the world, stem from the corruption of c*hesed* and *gevurah.* This is reflected in the twin threats to our existence of persecution and the enticement of assimilation. These are dramatic examples of how *chesed* and *gevurah* have descended so low. The

spiritual powers of Abraham and Isaac have been perverted into tools of destruction.

Jacob wanted to demonstrate that, at precisely the moment they thought he was about to die, in truth he was going to live on; there would be no deterioration or devolution of his power of synthesis. Instead, it will lead to Redemption. He therefore emphasized that the negative behavior that emerged from these sons were aberrations and not related to him. Jacob's message to his sons and to us all is that his approach would lead to Redemption and the negation of death in all of its forms.

This analysis sheds light on the Rebbe's instructions to us to study Torah as a way of preparing ourselves for the Final Redemption; it is because Torah is *tiferes,* the synthesis of *chesed* and *gevurah*. The Rebbe added particular emphasis on study of the Torah subjects of Moshiach and Redemption. By studying these subjects, we unleash the powerful truth of *tiferes.* With this power we condition ourselves and the entire world to live a Moshiach-oriented life; one of total balance between *chesed* and *gevurah* and thereby hasten the Final Redemption.

ESSAY SIX

DID YOU BRING A GIFT FOR MOSHIACH?

Moshiach is the ultimate synthesis of the greatest power of leadership and the ultimate level of goodness and holiness.

Moshiach is called *Peretz* because, as the word suggests, he can break through all barriers.

He can therefore penetrate even the toughest personality and excavate that individual's goodness.

ESSAY SIX

DID YOU BRING A GIFT FOR MOSHIACH?

Bringing Gifts to Moshiach

Jacob summoned all his sons to give them his final blessings before he was ready to leave this world. These blessings were not just good wishes but they were also pregnant with prophetic allusions to their futures.

In addressing his son Yehudah, Jacob states:

> The scepter shall not depart from Yehudah, nor a scholar from among his descendants between his feet, until Shiloh arrives and his will be an assemblage of nations.

The reference of the arrival of Shiloh, Rashi explains, "refers to Moshiach to whom kingdom belongs." It is interesting to note that the words for "*yavo shiloh*-arival of Shiloh" have the numerical equivalency of the word Moshiach.

Rashi then cites a Midrashic source that explains that the word *Shiloh* is a composite of two words *shi* and *lo,* which means: "a gift to him." This is a reference to Moshiach to whom all nations will bring gifts.

We must try to understand why Jacob refers to Moshiach as "the one to whom nations will bring gifts." Isn't Moshiach a far more important person? Aren't there far more consequential accomplishments of Moshiach and the impact he will have on the world than just getting people to bring him gifts? Doesn't Moshiach embody the unparalleled combination of a powerful monarch, builder of the Bais Hamikdash, great spiritual leader, preeminent teacher of Torah, liberator of Israel from all its enemies, gatherer of all scattered and lost Jews, and the ultimate peace maker, who will bring universal peace?

Yet, incredibly, notwithstanding these and many other attractive attributes, Moshiach is simply depicted here as one to whom nations will bring gifts!

Second, why does Moshiach need or want the gifts of the nations of the world? For Moshiach material possessions are meaningless. Moshiach possesses the most sublime G-dly soul. Yet, surprisingly, the Torah attempts to impress us with Moshiach's arrival by the gifts that the nations will bring him!

Monarchy without Brute Force

Upon deeper reflection we can see that the title "Shiloh" is indeed a most fitting and noble description of Moshiach. The following explanation is based on the commentary of

the Maharal. The Maharal explains that the title Shiloh ("one to whom the nations will bring gifts") describes Moshiach's unique and unprecedented form of monarchy.

In the Maharal's own words:

> Other kings rule over others with brute force and a mighty hand. The King Moshiach, however, is not like that. He will not reign with a mighty hand and brute force. Rather, everyone will be as gift to him; i.e., they will all be drawn to him, in the manner that one brings a gift to another. Similarly, the entire world will subject themselves to the rule of the King Moshiach. He is therefore called Shiloh, meaning "a gift is brought to him." That will insure universal peace because everyone will be under his jurisdiction.

The Maharal's explanation suggests that the reference to the nations bringing gifts is only a metaphor. It really means to convey the idea that the nations will be drawn to Moshiach just as it is when one brings a gift to another.

The Maharal, however, does not explain why the nations of the world will be so drawn to Moshiach.

If we were to take the words of the Midrash literally, that the nations will actually bring gifts, we could argue that Moshiach's power would compel them to pay homage to him with gifts. But, if bringing gifts is meant figuratively, in

other words that they will be drawn to him, a question remains: what will Moshiach's appeal be to the nations of the world that will draw them to him?

Another question can be raised. The Maharal also stated that Moshiach will insure universal peace because everyone will be under his jurisdiction. This statement is puzzling. It appears to contradict the Maharal's first point that Moshiach will not be a conventional monarch who uses force to subjugate his nation. How then will he remove all of the obstacles for peace? How will all the warring nations give up their arms if there is no powerful military force to make it happen?

Why Pray for the Restoration of the Monarchy

To better understand the appeal of Moshiach we must first explain why we have been hoping and praying for millennia that Moshiach come and redeem us. Haven't we had our fill with kings? Haven't we "evolved" to appreciate that the best form of government is one that ensures everyone's freedom, such as in a democracy? Indeed, as Jews—whose very name, derived from Yehudah, means gratitude—we have always expressed our profound gratitude to our host nations that have guaranteed us freedom to live and practice as Jews.

Why then would we want to go back to the time when we were governed by absolute monarchs, most of whom were less than virtuous, to put it mildly?

The truth of the matter is that Moshiach's influence and appeal is based on the power he wields to empower **us**.

The Source of Leadership

We have seen evil individuals unleash the evil in millions of otherwise law-abiding citizens. They did not necessarily need brute force or the force of logic to sway their constituents to engage in murderous actions. Leadership, good or evil, is a power of the soul that few people possess. This power of leadership is rooted in the Divine attribute of *Malchus* and has the capacity to move mountains. The Talmud expresses this sentiment when it states: "The king speaks and a mountain is uprooted."

Jewish law gives a king the right to break through physical boundaries to make his trip shorter. This can be interpreted figuratively as well. The power of royalty is such that it can break through the otherwise impenetrable layers of our personalities to uncover hidden powers we possess, whose presence was unbeknownst even to ourselves.

If the leader is evil, he will be empowered to dig beneath the surface of our personalities and discover any latent, subconscious evil we may possess, even if it has never been exposed or translated into evil behavior.

Conversely, a good leader will be able to dig beneath the surface of our personalities and discover the latent good and holiness we definitely possess.

An effective leader is like a drill and a pump; a drill that discovers the subterranean resources and a pump to bring those newly discovered resources to the surface.

Now, the degree to which a leader can dig into our psyche and extract our subconscious forces of goodness and holiness is commensurate to the leader's leadership powers and own goodness and holiness. Not all holy people have been leaders, and not all leaders were holy.

Moshiach is the ultimate synthesis of the greatest power of leadership and the ultimate level of goodness and holiness. Moshiach is called *Peretz* because, as the word suggests, he can break through all barriers. He can therefore penetrate even the toughest personality and excavate that individual's goodness.

Unprecedented Leadership

We can now understand why the nations of the world will be drawn to Moshiach. His unprecedented leadership capacity will reveal the heretofore hidden goodness that all of humanity possesses but which have not been allowed to surface. Moshiach does not have to use brute force to control the world; he will reveal that the world has the ability to control itself.

This explains the Maharal's comment that the reason there will be universal peace is because we will all be under his jurisdiction. This does not suggest that Moshiach will have to exercise brutal force to keep us from fighting wars, for that would not entail true peace.

Rather, the Maharal's point is that under the influence of Moshiach our innate true peaceful nature will be revealed. Even the most discordant individual has a peaceful and peace-loving core. Under normal circumstances it will not affect that individual's personality or behavior because it is so deeply suppressed.

However, under the influence of Moshiach each and every individual will be able to be who he or she truly is at their core level, where their G-dly souls reside. Peace will be the greatest beneficiary because at the core level, everyone wants peace.

We can now reconcile the figurative explanation of the gift of the nations with its literal meaning. Figuratively, the nations will be drawn to Moshiach's leadership and charisma. As a result they will discover heretofore hidden reservoirs of goodness and holiness. This then is the gift they will bring to Moshiach. They will show him their newly discovered gifts of self-discovery and the spiritual and G-dly energy they will generate.

A Two-Way-Street

But the Messianic process is a two way street. While the reference to Moshiach as Shiloh defines Moshiach's influence over us, we too must work diligently at revealing our hidden traits and virtues. We too possess a "regal" power to dig deep into our psyches and discover our latent and suppressed virtues and then reveal them. This is the power of *simcha*-joy. When we are in a state of joy, we possess the same royal powers of a monarch. We can break through the barriers of our personalities and discover our true inner cores.

This connection between Moshiach and joy is hinted in the very word Moshiach, the letters of which, when rearranged, spell the word *yisamch*-he will rejoice, or *yisamach*-he will cause others to rejoice.

ESSAY SEVEN

CREATIVE BLESSINGS

Whenever possible we should make an attempt to bless one another, because the mere exercise of blessing has the capacity to actualize latent positive qualities.

Our wanting behavior may belie the true positive motivation behind our actions.

All that we have to do is remove the negative crust that distorts our true.

ESSAY SEVEN

CREATIVE BLESSINGS

Omitted Blessings

As Jacob prepares for his passing, he summons all of his sons to his bedside for his final blessings to them. To each and every son Jacob imparted his final blessing.

There is, however one anomaly in this narrative. The tribes of Shimon and Levi were not blessed but reprimanded. After citing several things that they did wrong — the massacre of the city of Shechem and the sale of Joseph — Jacob concludes: "Cursed shall be their anger for it is mighty."

True, a father has a right to rebuke his sons. But, why did he not bless them as well? And isn't it strange that Levi — destined to be the progenitor of an entire tribe of priests and the ancestor of the two greatest Jews ever, Moses and Aaron — of all sons should not be blessed?

Rashi, in anticipation of this question, comments on the

verse that appears at the end of the twelve blessings, that Jacob included all of his sons — even the ones he did not expressly bless — in his general blessing that followed the individual ones.

But there is still a need to understand why he didn't give them their own individual blessing as well.

Cursing Anger

To understand the reason why Jacob did not give them their own individual blessing, it is necessary to analyze the words of rebuke Jacob gave Shimon and Levi. "Cursed should be their anger." Rashi notes that Jacob did not curse them but their anger.

One could raise an obvious question. The fact that Shimon and Levi had a temper paled in comparison with the destruction of a city and the sale of a brother. Yet it appears that Jacob was more upset at their temperament rather than at their actions. Isn't it rather strange that Jacob should put a greater emphasis on their temperament than on their behavior?

The answer to all these questions lies in the realization that Shimon and Levi did not need Jacob's blessings for they were truly blessed with the keenest sensitivity. Their attack of the city of Shechem was motivated by their moral

outrage and their love for their sister who was violated by the son of the mayor of that city.

Even their treatment of Joseph was based on their feeling that Joseph's moral behavior was wanting.

Thus Jacob would not curse them and not even make the biggest fuss about their extreme actions. What Shimon and Levi needed was to take the beautiful gem of sensitivity that they possessed and remove the dirt that dulled its sheen. This dirt was their propensity to anger.

Didn't Need the Blessing

Once Jacob cursed their anger, thereby giving them the spiritual energy to remove the blemish of anger that stained their otherwise pure and sensitive souls, they were not in need of any additional blessing.

A blessing is not just an expression of good wishes for another. A true blessing is where one enables another to release their hidden potential for goodness.

Shimon and Levi, whose positive traits were already well defined and clearly manifested, needed only the removal of the negative crust that rendered their sensitivity and passion harmful. Removal of their anger alone would allow their natural qualities to flourish..

Focus on the Trait, Not the Person

There are several lessons in this entire episode for all of us, particularly in our own day and age. Firstly, even when we reprimand one for their undesirable traits we should never curse **them**, just their evil traits.

Secondly, whenever possible we should make an attempt to bless one another, because the mere exercise of blessing has the capacity to actualize latent positive qualities.

Thirdly, one's wanting behavior may belie the true positive motivation that one has. All that we have to do is help that person remove the negative crust that distorts the true nature of the individual.

Fourthly, this narrative serves as a source of inspiration for us:

As we await the imminent arrival of Moshiach and are well aware of our shortcomings, we ask ourselves: Are we so deserving of Moshiach?

The answer is that underneath the undesirable traits that we might have is a positive and holy character. The final removal of the residual cover that obscures the goodness will be removed by Moshiach. Thus, even those among us who are in need of Jacob's words of rebuke, are truly gems, who are ready for the final Redemption.

ESSAY EIGHT

OPEN EYES AND HEARTS

When we look around us, we might imagine that the world is in state of spiritual decline and that we are so far from the state of Redemption.

Despite all the negative phenomena of recent times we must realize that, on the contrary, the world has changed for the good.

ESSAY EIGHT

OPEN EYES AND HEARTS

No Separation

This week's Parsha is unusual because of the way it begins. In all other parts of the Torah there is a separation between one Parsha and the one that follows. Either an entire line is left blank, or, at the very least, there is a blank space left between the end of one Parsha and the beginning of the next Parsha. This week's Parsha, *Vayechi* begins immediately after the ending of last week's parsha with no separation at all.

Rashi addresses this anomaly and explains that the reason this Parsha is "*s'tumah*"-closed" is to express the feelings of the Jewish people at that time that Jacob departed. "The eyes and the hearts of the Jewish people were closed from the distress of the bondage" that followed Jacob's passing.

A question has been raised by commentators. The bondage did not begin until the last of Joseph's brothers died, decades after Jacob's passing. Why then were their eyes and hearts closed upon the passing of Jacob?

Spiritual Bondage Began with the Passing of Jacob

One answer given is that while it is true that the physical bondage had not begun until much after the passing of Jacob, the spiritual bondage began immediately upon Jacob's departure.

But, this answer needs to be clarified in light of an observation made by our Sages that the Torah does not use the word death with regard to Jacob. From this they derive that Jacob did not, in fact, really die. The Talmud explains that because his children were alive and continued in his way, Jacob himself was truly alive. How then can it be said that they were already experiencing a spiritual form of bondage and decline, when the legacy of Jacob continued?

The answer to this question is that though Jacob's influence continued, his children viewed it as no more than just a legacy of a deceased person. To them, Jacob had departed and was not the same Jacob he was before. Sure, they still felt Jacob's spirit, but they could not "see" him in the same vivid, realistic and palpable way that saw him before.

This represented the beginning of the spiritual bondage, because spiritual bondage does not occur overnight. It begins with but the most imperceptible decline.

Degradation Began With Jacob's Arrival in Egypt

We can now also understand why the Torah alludes to the "closed eyes and hearts" at the beginning of this week's Parsha, which begins with the words "and Jacob lived in the land of Egypt" rather than in a later verse where the Torah actually describes Jacob's passing?

The spiritual degradation that the Children of Israel experienced actually began before Jacob's passing. Notwithstanding the Torah's emphasis that Jacob "lived" in Egypt — and that according to some commentators, these were his best and most vibrant years of his life — the appearance to his children was that he was on a lower spiritual level. He was no longer the same robust and spiritually powerful Jacob who wrestled with angels and prevailed.

Open Your Eyes and Hearts!

This then is what Rashi meant when he said that their "eyes and hearts" were closed. The meaning of "eyes" here is that they no longer saw Jacob and his spiritual inspiration the way that they saw it previously. This led to the fact that their hearts and feelings likewise waned and degenerated.

The lesson for our generation is that we must learn how to

keep our eyes open.

When we look around us, we might imagine that the world is in state of spiritual decline and that we are so far from the state of Redemption. Despite all the negative phenomena of recent times we must realize that, on the contrary, the world has changed for the good.

It behooves us to "open our eyes" and to see the underlying reality that the thousands of years of collective positive efforts have left an indelible mark on the world. We must see and appreciate the many signs around us that point to the inevitable, that the world is soon to experience the ultimate realization of the promise and prophecy of the Torah, made in this week's Parsha and in many other places — the coming of Moshiach.

By keeping our eyes "open" and seeing the good and holy in everything and viewing life optimistically, our hearts will likewise be open to expressing the love and yearning for a more G-dly world. That will mark the end of bondage and the beginning of Redemption.

ESSAY NINE

PROBING THE INNER RECESSES OF THE SOUL

Joseph's crying was a cathartic process that enabled him to search his own soul for any trace of revenge that he might have possessed in his subconscious.

ESSAY NINE

PROBING THE INNER RECESSES OF THE SOUL

Joseph Wept

Near the end of this week's Parsha, *Vayechi*, the Torah recounts how after Jacob's passing, Joseph's brothers were concerned that Joseph would now try to take revenge for having sold him to Egypt. They therefore sent messengers to him and then personally told him that:

> "Your father did command before his death, saying, so shall you say to Joseph, O forgive, I pray you, the trespass of your brothers, and their sin; for evil have they done to you. And now we pray you, forgive the trespass of the servants of the G-d of your father."

After the Torah reports his brothers' plea, the Torah records Joseph's reaction by saying:

> "And Joseph wept when they spoke to him."

Why did Joseph weep? Commentators explain that this was because he was troubled by the fact that they suspected him that he would take revenge from them. The truth was, of course, that the thought of revenge was so out of

character for Joseph who readily forgave them, that he was brought to tears.

However, the question can still be asked. When a person is suspected of something wrong and he knows that he is guiltless, there should be reason to rejoice. Doesn't the Talmud quote the great Talmudic Sage, Rabbi Yosi as saying: "May my lot be among those who are suspected [of wrongdoing] but are truly guiltless?" (Talmud, Shabbos 118b)

Diffing into the Sub-Conscious

The answer can be provided by referring to the story of the second Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Dovber, who spent many hours counseling people about their material and spiritual problems. At one of these occasions, where there were long lines of people waiting to see him, he suddenly stopped receiving people and locked himself up in his room, devoting the next few days to heartfelt prayer and introspection. After several days, Rabbi Dovber resumed seeing people and counseling them.

When one of his followers asked why he had suddenly stopped seeing people and spent several days in such solemn prayer, he replied that when anybody would come and tell him their spiritual problems, the only way he could help them was to search within his own soul to find a

similar, albeit, far more subtle, form of their shortcoming or sin, in his own soul.

The Rebbe then related that a few days earlier, a man came to him and confided that he had committed such a horrible sin, that he could not find this transgression within his soul, even in its most subtle form.

Yet, the very fact that Divine Providence had sent this man to him for assistance, was proof that he must be able to help him and he was therefore convinced that he had, at least, some miniscule trace of this deficiency in his own personality, embedded deeply in the farthest reaches of his soul.

The Rebbe therefore started an unrelenting searched deep down within his soul to find even the most infinitesimal trace of this transgression. After a few days of soul-searching, he finally located the "flaw" and corrected it. At that point and only then could he help that individual and resume his efforts at counseling and helping others.

Understanding Joseph's Weeping: An Exercise in Soul-Searching

We can now understand why Joseph was driven to tears when he heard that his brothers suspected him of taking revenge. Despite the fact that he did not harbor any trace

of hatred or revenge, the mere fact that his brothers reported that their father considered it a possibility, was a sign that deep down in the most hidden crevices of his soul, he might have harbored a microscopic amount of anger against his brothers, that was so embedded within his psyche that he was not aware of its existence.

Joseph's crying was a cathartic process that enabled him to search his own soul for any trace of revenge that he might have possessed in his subconscious.

Everything Revealed

In the Book of Daniel we are told that before the Messianic Age all secret matters will be revealed. This includes all the dark secrets of our personalities of which we ourselves may not be aware. Simultaneously, all the hidden qualities and virtues that we were not aware that they even existed will also coming to the surface.

We must realize that in the present era, as we prepare to enter into the Messianic Age, we were given the unique opportunity to achieve unprecedented goals. Some extraordinary talents that were previously latent are now coming to the fore, giving us the ability to accomplish unprecedented positive things.

However, we must also anticipate the emergence of some

negative traits that were deeply embedded within our souls.

By utilizing the newly discovered energies and talents and by eradicating the hidden forms of evil, we will be well prepared for the imminent arrival of Moshiach and the world of Redemption.

ESSAY TEN

SHOFAR THERAPY

Our contribution to the process of bringing Moshiach is commensurate with the outcome.

We too should dedicate our lives to the delivering of beautiful words to others, words that emanate from the heart, even as we sometimes have to awaken and jolt others into reorienting their priorities in life.

Our words should not be condescending and harsh, rather like the shofar expressive of the purist of our soul's intentions.

ESSAY TEN

SHOFAR THERAPY

"Beautiful Words"

On his deathbed, Jacob gathers all of his children and blesses them, each according to his unique characteristics and the characteristics of his descendent tribes.

To the tribe of Naphtali, Jacob says the following cryptic words:

> "Naphtali is a hind sent off who delivers beautiful sayings."

The reference to the tribe of Naphtali delivering beautiful words has been explained several ways by our Bible commentators.

According to the Aramaic translator Onkeles, the "beautiful words"" are those words of praise and thanksgiving that the members of this tribe offered to G-d in expression of gratitude for the fruit that his land would yield.

The Midrash interprets the "beautiful words" as a reference to the song of triumph that Deborah sung after the victory

the tribe of Naphtali had a hand in bringing about.

Another Midrashic commentary focuses on the Hebrew word for beautiful, "*shefer*," cognate to the word shofar. This, the Midrash states, is an allusion to the words of Torah that were given with the accompaniment of the *shofar*, the ram's horn.

One may ask, why are Naphtali's words — whether words of praise or words of Torah — described as *shefer*, which means beautiful but is related to the shofar? There are other words the Torah could have used that convey the message of beauty. Why does the Torah use a word that relates to the shofar?

The fact that the Torah was given with the accompaniment of the shofar, does not adequately explain why this term is used. After all, the shofar was only a secondary aspect of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai? What is it about the *shofar* that defines the way the tribe of Naphtali communicates its message of Torah or praise?

Shofar: An Ego-less

The metaphor of a shofar is one that is employed by the prophet Isaiah to describe the words of rebuke that he conveys to the Jewish people.

"As a shofar, raise your voice to tell my nation their

iniquity and the House of Jacob their sins."

R. *Shmuel Shmelke*, one of the early Chassidic masters explained that when a person offers words of criticism to another, the recipient of the criticism will invariably put up resistance to hearing about their own shortcomings. How does one break through the barrier that makes people incapable of accepting valid and constructive criticism?

To this end, the prophet declares that one who offers criticism should be like the shofar. An instrument has no ego, vested interest, personal agenda or any ulterior motive when it makes it sounds. It simply is, as its name suggests, an instrument. A message that comes from one whose ego is muted while he conveys it, is a message that will be received and will have its intended effect.

In the words of our Sages, "Words that emanate from the heart will enter the heart and have their desired effect." When one's words, even harsh words of rebuke, are reflections of one's purist feelings and intentions and not expressions of self-righteous indignation — as the shofar — they will penetrate even the most hardened individual and touch his/her core of sincerity and purity.

The Distinction of Naftali

This then explains why Naphtali's words of praise and

Torah are likened to a shofar.

Naphtali's distinction was that when the Israelites traveled in the desert in formation, the very last tribe to move was that of Naphtali. Naphtali's position of being last reflected its self-effacing character. When Naphtali spoke, be it words of praise or words of Torah, including the parts of Torah that provide tough words of reprimand, they were all beautiful words, because they were not colored by ego and selfish interests. Whatever Naphtali spoke came straight from the heart and were like the shofar that had no personal agenda.

Heralding Moshiach

Our prophetic literature is also replete with references to the shofar as the means by which the coming of the Moshiach will be heralded. Why is the shofar employed as the metaphor of G-d's way of announcing the Messianic Age?

When a person hears the sound of the shofar, it awakens them, arouses and even jolts them into realizing that something significant has happened. In this pre-Messianic era, we are prone to falling asleep, not realizing what is important in our lives and what can be dispensed with.

But the use of the shofar metaphor with respect to

Moshiach also conveys that Moshiach's message is beautiful because it is like the shofar. Whatever words Moshiach will utter comes straight from the heart. It is beautiful precisely because it is not embellished with fancy musical notes and harmonies. It is not evocative of an ego that wishes to assert itself on others; rather it is evocative of a pure, selfless desire to bring beauty and purity to the world. This is the beauty of the shofar, of Naphtali and Moshiach.

Deliver Beautiful Words

Our contribution to the process of bringing Moshiach is commensurate with the outcome. We too should dedicate our lives to the delivering of beautiful words to others, words that emanate from the heart, even as we sometimes have to awaken and jolt others into reorienting their priorities in life.

Our words should not be condescending and harsh, rather like the shofar expressive of the purist of our soul's intentions.

This will certainly contribute to the sounding of the "Great Shofar" that will herald the imminent coming of the Moshiach, who will usher in an age of shofar-beauty, when we will all express our gratitude to G-d for the end of exile and the beginning of the Age of Redemption.

ESSAY ELEVEN

JACOB NEVER DIED!

The definition of truth is not simply the opposite of a lie.

The "true" meaning of truth is that it is consistent.

If something ceases at a certain point then it is not pure and unadulterated truth.

ESSAY ELEVEN

JACOB NEVER DIED!

Paradox

This week's Torah portion, entitled "Vayechi Ya'akov-And Jacob lived," actually describes the events that led up to Jacob's passing.

This anomaly is resolved by referring to the comment made by our Talmudic sages, cited by Rashi, concerning Jacob's passing: "Jacob did not die."

The Talmud raises the obvious question: "if so, why did they embalm him, bury him and eulogize him?"

The Talmud's cryptic answer yields three possibilities. According to Rashi and others, Jacob did not really physically die. The fact that he was buried etc. is because the "Egyptians *imagined* that he had died."

In other words, Jacob's death was real only from the limited perception of the Egyptian people. In truth, however, even Jacob's physical body transcended the phenomenon of death.

Living though his Children, Reincarnation

Other classical commentators as the Meharsha (sixteenth century Talmudic sage) explain Jacob's not dying as a reference to his soul living on forever through his children who carry on his tradition.

A third mystical interpretation asserts that Jacob's soul lives on in this physical world, by virtue of it being reincarnated into the bodies of subsequent Jewish leaders.

What is it, we may ask, about Jacob that places him above the constraints of time? Why doesn't the Torah say the same about Abraham and Isaac, or, other great Jewish people?

True Truth

Jacob, our Talmudic and mystical sages tell us, epitomized the attribute of *emes*, truth.

The definition of truth is not simply the opposite of a lie. The "true" meaning of truth is that it is consistent. If something ceases at a certain point then it is not pure and unadulterated truth. Jacob, thus, who personified this attribute, could not possibly have lost some of his existence.

Eternal Life in the Future

The thirteenth principle of faith, formulated by Maimonides, is the belief in the Resurrection of the Dead. This means that in the era of Moshiach, all the dead will come back to life and will live on forever.

Hence, the phenomenon that was reserved for one person - Jacob - will extend itself to all of us.

This will occur because in the Messianic age, the Divine attribute of *emes*, truth will be revealed in its full glory, so that everyone will be permeated with this Divine power – to live, in the fullest sense of the word.

All this is alluded to in the name of this week's Torah portion - Vayechi. May we all merit seeing and appreciating true life imminently with the full revelation of Moshiach and the ultimate complete and *true* Redemption.

ESSAY TWELVE

TRUE LIFE-DUAL GOODNESS

There are those who feel a very close relationship with G-d; while others feel a sense of affinity and responsibility for others.

Any good one does in either of these two directions stands on its own, but falls short of its goal if it is not combined with the other.

It is not simply that two is better than one, but that each one of these areas of goodness contributes to and enhances the quality of the other.

ESSAY TWELVE

TRUE LIFE-DUAL GOODNESS

Jacob's Best Years

In this week's parsha, the Torah recounts the final years of Jacob's life. The opening verse of the parsha is: "And Jacob lived ("*Vayechi*") in the land of Egypt seventeen years."

The fact that the Torah states the precise number of years that he lived in Egypt prompted the *Ba'al Haturim* (fifteenth century commentator devoted to finding deeper meaning in the text by use of the method of *gematria*-numerology) to make the following observation:

Vayechi Yaakov-And Jacob lived—Jacob's entire life consisted of the number of years that represent the numerical value of the word *Vayechi*-And he lived, which is thirty-four.

These thirty four years include the seventeen last years of his life that he spent with his son Joseph in Egypt as well as the seventeen years that he spent with Joseph from the time he was born until he was sold into captivity by his brothers.

All his other years were punctuated with pain and sorrow, however, these two periods of seventeen years represented true life for Jacob.

Two Periods of Good

It is also interesting that the number seventeen is numerically equivalent of the Hebrew word *tov*, which means good. This would suggest that each of the seventeen years were good, yet what accorded his life the status of true life (*"Vayechi")* was the **combined** strength of the two periods of seventeen years that Jacob spent with Joseph—before he was sold and after he was reunited with him as the viceroy of Egypt.

One basic difference between these two periods is that in the first instance Joseph was the **recipient** of Jacob's largesse while in the last seventeen years of Jacob's life the tables were turned—Joseph was Jacob's **provider**.

Since Jacob is regarded as the prototype of all of his descendants, it follows that we too can only experience true life when we can impart our beliefs and values to our offspring, who absorb everything we teach them—as Joseph did for the first seventeen years of his life—and then live to see how the child retains everything that he has learned, and is able to "regurgitate" it authentically, with some significant contributions and embellishments of

his own. Indeed, as has been pointed out in earlier Torah messages, the very name Joseph means "may he increase" or "may he grow."

Twice "It was Good"

Another approach to the two seventeen-year periods of good Jacob spent with Joseph can be appreciated by referring to a Talmudic discussion concerning the significance of the third day of creation where G-d declares twice "And it was good." This, the Talmud states, symbolizes one who possesses dual goodness: "good to heaven" and "good to other creatures."

There are those who feel a very close relationship with G-d; while others feel a sense of affinity and responsibility for others. Needless to say, any good one does in either of these two directions stands on its own, but falls short of its goal if it is not combined with the other.

It is not simply that two is better than one, but that each one of these areas of goodness contributes to and enhances the quality of the other.

When we think about G-d, it is crucial that we also think about the things that G-d holds dear to His "heart." In the words of a great Chassidic Master, R. Schneur Zalman of Liadi, "One who loves G-d must also love those whom G-d

loves." If one loves G-d but does not love those whom He loves, their love of G-d is not as deep as when he loves the one whom G-d loves.

Conversely, when one is involved in the pursuit of helping others because one feels how the other possesses a Divine soul that shares a common G-dly origin and bond with one's own soul, then the assistance one renders is infused with a part of that soul. And the infusion of this soul will make the relationship more complete, vibrant and enduring.

Good to G-d and G00d to People

The first period of seventeen years that Jacob spent imparting his spiritual legacy to Joseph parallels the concept of "good to G-d."

The second period of seventeen years in which he was the beneficiary of Joseph's beneficence represents the twin ideal of "good to creatures." Combined the thirty four years—the numerical value of "*Vayechi*-and he lived"—gave Jacob, and all of his progeny, the dimension of life that transcends goodness.

Jacob Never Died

Unlike the other Patriarchs, the Torah does not employ the

word *Vayamos*-and he died for Jacob. This, the Talmud observes, is to teach us that Jacob, in truth, never died.

One way of understanding this statement is that true life—the combination of "good to G-d" and "good to creatures," that was experienced by Jacob did not cease with his passing; it was bequeathed to his descendants, the Jewish people. Jacob's ability to experience life in its fullest sense, the performance and experience of dual goodness, continues to this very day within the Jewish community.

And while exile conditions have occasionally weakened these two forms of goodness, this combination has remained a staple of Jewish existence to this very day, and it is one of the important factors in paving the way for the coming of Moshiach, the description of whom by the prophet Isaiah is a person who is imbued with a heightened sense of awareness of and reverence for G-d coupled with a keen sense of justice and kindness.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

FISH ON DRY LAND

There are hidden realms of our personality that we may never discover that they exist.

While Freud spoke of how the subconscious affects our conscious minds, there are hidden parts of our psyche and soul that will forever defy exposure.

The greatest blessing we can give someone is that they realize their full potential of the revealed talents and virtues as well as the hidden.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

FISH ON DRY LAND

"In the Midst of the Earth"

Before Jacob's passing, this week's parsha relates, he summoned his son Joseph and his two sons, Menasheh and Ephraim, to confer his final blessings upon them. These blessings have been preserved in our tradition as part of the blessings many fathers give their children. They are also recited after the conclusion of the Shabbos when we invoke Divine blessings for the forthcoming week. This poignant blessing reads:

> "May the angel who has delivered me from all evil bless the lads, and may my name and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac be called upon them, and may they increase abundantly like fish in the midst of the earth."

Commentators focus their attention on the concluding words: "And may they increase abundantly like fish in the midst of the earth." Commentators ask: While we can understand what the comparison of one's children to fish is

all about—they should proliferate as fish—what do the words "in the midst of the earth" add? Even if these words were deleted, would we not have known that Jacob was wishing his descendants that they multiply on dry land? Would it have occurred to anyone that he wanted them to dwell in water?

Concealed and Revealed Good

Water is a symbol for those aspects of life that are concealed. While the seas teem with living creatures, they are hidden from our view.

Land, by contrast, represents things that are on the surface, for everyone to see.

All of life should be viewed to exist on two planes. There are aspects of our lives that are obvious and there are those that are concealed.

When one does something nice for another, or speaks favorably about another, these are the revealed aspects of goodness that generate positive energy, regardless of one's true feelings. There are personalities who are open books. Everything about them is on the table, so to speak, for everyone to see. There are also dimensions of an experience that can be seen by all. When these events occur, we don't have to probe too deeply to appreciate what had occurred.

These modes of behavior, personalities or experiences, can all be said to inhabit the "earth," or "dry land." In the terminology of Kabbalah this overt dimension is known as "*alma d'isgalya*-The Revealed World."

There is, however, a separate world that exists simultaneously with the revealed and obvious dimension of existence. It is known in Kabbalah as "*alma d'iiskasya*-the "hidden world." This hidden world is often represented by the metaphor of fish that exist in the waters that conceal their existence.

When dealing with a person's secret thoughts, one's hidden personality or the underlying causes or dynamics of an experience, we are dealing with a world that is usually hidden from our view.

The Conscious and Sub-Conscious

On a deeper plane, even the thoughts and hidden personality traits are still within reach, and are, for really revealed if only to ourselves. And most frequently, a person's thoughts and aspirations can be determined by virtue of the way they behave.

There is, however, a deeper world that is even concealed from our own conscious minds. There are hidden realms of our personality that we may never discover that they

exist. And while Freud spoke of how the subconscious affects our conscious minds, there are hidden parts of our psyche and soul that will forever defy exposure.

The greatest blessing we can give someone is that they realize their full potential of the revealed talents and virtues as well as the hidden.

Thus, when Jacob blessed his grandchildren, he was actually bestowing upon them the energy to realize their potential. But Jacob was not content to wish them success in their positive endeavors. Jacob wanted his progeny to access even the hidden dimension of their personalities that are utterly elusive.

Jacob therefore blessed them with the ability to access the hidden spiritual energy, represented by the fish that are submerged and hidden in the seas. Jacob wanted that this hidden energy should have an effect on their conscious and revealed faculties.

Proliferating Blessing

However, Jacob was not content with simply blessing them with this concealed energy. True, frequently, one can draw inspiration from one's "unconscious" dimension of spirituality, but this amounts to no more than a limited, fleeting and superficial inspiration. Jacob wanted that their

hidden energy should "proliferate" and be fully revealed "in the midst of the earth." This means that Jacob blessed them with the ability to unleash the concealed energy in full force and allow it to manifest itself overtly.

Discovering Hidden Aspects of Our Souls Today

Jacob's blessing, however, will not be fully realized until the Messianic Age. The obstructive and obscuring conditions of exile do not allow us to be "in touch" with our true personalities.

As we prepare for the imminent arrival of Moshiach, we frequently discover hidden aspects of our psyche. This is a result of our close proximity to the Era of Redemption when our hidden nature will also be redeemed and revealed. As is true with respect to all other matters of Redemption, our Sags inform us that we are given a "taste" of what is to come as a way of preparing for the complete feast. In this spirit, there are times when we discover new layers of our own personalities that enable us to live our lives—as we wait for Moshiach—in a Moshiach oriented way—tapping even the hidden resources we possess.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

THE MORAL FAMILY

Morality defines the way we behave vis-à-vis G-d.

When a person engages in forbidden relationships it may not be a direct crime against humanity but it is considered to be a moral abomination and an affront to G-d.

The second form of morality involves one's relationship with others. Adultery and abuse are forms of immorality in the sphere of human relationships.

The writing of a Kesubah was intended to remove both of these blemishes.

ESSAY FOURTEEN

THE MORAL FAMILY

No Recognition

Jacob sensed that his end was near and he summoned Joseph and his two sons Menasheh and Ephraim to his bedside to bless them. When Joseph presents them to his father he asks "Who are they?"

How could it be that Jacob did not recognize his own grandchildren with who he spent the last seventeen years of his life and whom he most likely saw and interacted with on numerous occasions?

Rashi seems to have anticipated this question, and he therefore states:

> "He attempted to bless them, but the Divine presence withdrew from him because of the wicked Jeroboam and Ahab, who were destined to be born from Ephraim, and Yehu and his sons [who were destined to be born] from Menasheh. [Jacob] said, "Who are these?" i.e. "From where were these boys born, who are unfit for blessing?" So Joseph said,

> "with this," showing [Jacob] his marriage deed and his Ketubah."

In other words, according to Rashi Jacob certainly recognized them, but couldn't fathom how his grandchildren appeared to be unworthy to receive his blessings. There must be something wrong with the way they were born.

Rashi's comment is difficult to understand.

First, why would the fact that wicked people centuries later would be the descendants of Menasheh and Ephraim deter Jacob from blessing them?

Second, haven't we learned in an earlier narrative that G-d judges people on their merits at the present moment and not on the basis of some future scenario? As Rashi told us, Yishmael was spared despite the argument of the angels that he should perish since in the future his descendants would harm the Jewish people, because G-d judges us as we are at that moment of judgment, not on how things will unfold in the future. Why then would Jacob deprive his beloved grandchildren of a blessing on account of their evil descendants?

Third, why would the fact that Joseph showed him his marriage contract and kesubah change anything? If they were not worthy of a blessing, as was evidenced by the departure of G-d's presence from Jacob when he sought to

bless them, why would producing a marriage contract and kesubah make a difference?

The fourth question we can ask—which will be the key to answering all of the questions—is why would he hold the realization of the evil descendants of Menasheh and Ephraim against them any more than holding it against Joseph and Jacob himself? When Jacob saw into the future and realized that these evil people would be their descendants, he had to know that they were also his own descendants. Yet, that did not faze him. Why?

Sowing the Seeds

The answer is that Jacob knew that whatever evil would come from him it was not his making; his actions could not have sown the seeds of such treachery associated with Jeroboam and Ahab. Likewise, having observed Joseph's behavior he knew that he was not responsible. The fact that the Divine presence departed from him convinced him that it was his two grandchildren whose behavior had sown the seeds of the future evil. But Jacob had to dismiss that theory as well, since he was well aware of their righteousness. How could they have been the one's to introduce the seeds of such unmitigated evil?

Jacob therefore concluded that the problem was not them but the way they were brought into the world. Something

must be amiss with the marriage of Joseph to his wife. After all, Osnat, Joseph's wife, was the daughter of Potiphar—not exactly a paragon of virtue—and given to him by Pharaoh, the leader of the world's most morally depraved nation.

To allay these concerns, Joseph demonstrated that, on the contrary, his marriage with Osnas conformed to the highest standards of morality on two levels.

Morality or the lack of it expresses itself in two ways:

First, morality defines the way we behave vis-à-vis G-d. When a person engages in forbidden relationships such as incest or is promiscuous it may not be a direct crime against humanity but it is considered to be a moral abomination and an affront to G-d. A marriage contract was designed to ensure that the marriage conforms to the standards of morality demanded by G-d.

The second form of morality involves one's relationship with others. Adultery and abuse are forms of immorality in the sphere of human relationships. The writing of a Kesubah was designed to ensure that the husband does not abuse his wife. To prevent a man from divorcing his wife and leaving her destitute, the Kesubah would force him to pay her a substantial amount. This would insure that he would either desist from divorcing his wife or would provide her with a means of survival. In addition, the

Kesubah details all of the obligations a husband has to his wife and is a constant reminder of them.

By Joseph showing Jacob that he had in fact married his wife in a way that incorporated both forms of moral standards, he was demonstrating that there can be no connection between Joseph's children and their evil descendants. The seeds for their extreme immorality must have been sown by some later individual(s) but not by Menasheh and Ephraim. Hence they were worthy of Jacob's blessings.

Why did the Divine Presence Leave Jacob?

The question still remains, why did the Divine presence leave Jacob when he sought to bless his two grandchildren? If they were indeed not tainted why would G-d abandon Jacob at that time?

Perhaps, the departure of the Divine presence from Jacob was intended to compel Joseph to produce those documents and thereby strengthen the moral and spiritual position of Menasheh and Ephraim. Had Jacob proceeded to bless them at the outset without any hitches we would never have discovered the high standard that Joseph followed in his marriage with their mother—which was clearly above and beyond the requirements of that period, before the Torah was given at Sinai.

The concealment of G-d's presence was thus actually the impetus to reveal the greatness of Joseph and his sons and how worthy they were to receive Jacob's special blessings. The darkness that ensued when Jacob lost his awareness of the Divine presence was the catalyst for greater light.

Moreover, it brought to light the virtues of Joseph's family who were born and bred in the morally depraved Egypt and yet were conceived and raised in the most refined and morally upright fashion.

Exile not [Just] a Punishment

The application of this story for our time is striking. We are at the tail end of the period of exile and stand poised to enter into the period of Redemption. As we stated in many of these messages, exile is defined not simply by the distancing of the Jewish people from their Land, but primarily by the alienation of G-d from them. What happened to Jacob for a few moments—the Divine presence departed from him—was a harbinger of the future exile of the Jewish people.

The purpose of exile, Chassidic teachings inform us, is not merely a punishment for our misdeeds thousands of years ago. It is actually a period of concealment intended to introduce even greater light.

As we have seen with regard to Jacob's taste of exile, it actually brought to light the superior moral level of Joseph's children, and their worthiness of Jacob's blessings.

Similarly, the exile that we are in is intended to bring to light the greatness of the Jewish people and prepare them for G-d's greatest blessings in the Messianic Age.

Notwithstanding the concealment of G-d's presence in exile, all of the pain and suffering, all of the forces of assimilation that threaten to undermine the integrity of the Torah's value system, we have remained loyal to its tenets.

The Jewish people who are referred to in the book of Psalms as "Joseph" can produce the marriage contract and kesubah, i.e. the teachings of the Torah that attest to the fidelity of the Jewish people to the principles of morality in both areas—in our relationship with G-d and with our fellow human being. The darkness of exile will therefore give way to an infinitely greater light and the experience of G-d's infinite blessings.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

NO EVIL EYE!

Optimism brings positive results.

This does not mean that optimistic people cannot be harmed. Joseph is a perfect refutation of this notion. He was thrown into a pit, sold into slavery, and tossed into prison.

What optimism does help is to deflect the negative energy—not negative actions—generated by negative people.

It also provides the person with faith and hope with the ability to cope with the adversity they are suffering.

And ultimately will bring an end to the pain and suffering.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

NO EVIL EYE!

Joseph Blessed with Extraordinary Gift

The blessing Jacob gave his son Joseph, recorded in this week's parsha reads:

> "Joseph is a charming son, as on whose charm impresses the eye who sees him…"

The Talmud translates the latter part of this quote in a novel way: "[Joseph] was above the effects of the [evil] eye." Joseph was blessed with an extraordinary gift: the evil eye cannot affect Joseph and the members of his tribe.

Many questions arise as we analyze this Talmudic statement:

First, why was Joseph different from all the other tribes?

Second, what practical implication does this have for all of us that are not Joseph's descendants?

Third, what precisely is the idea of the evil eye?

What is an Evil Eye? Two Approaches

There are at least two classical approaches to the understanding of the "evil eye" and its deleterious effects.

The first approach is that the eye contains powerful energy and when a person looks at another's good fortune with a jaundiced view it can actually become a potent force that can harm the individual who is being so eyed. The converse is also true that when one views another with a positive and loving look it exudes and generates positive energy that can have positive effects on that individual.

The second approach is that when a person is envious of another's good fortune it is received by G-d as a "complaint" as to why that individual has been given these blessings that were denied from other, perhaps more deserving, individuals. Once the Divine attribute of justice is, in effect, "petitioned" by the one with the jealous eye, G-d is "compelled" by His own system of justice to scrutinize that person's right to those blessings. If that person proves to be undeserving the blessings will be removed. Hence the evil eye (read: jealous eye) can indirectly cause harm to others.

These two explanations, however, do not explain why Joseph was immune to the "evil eye."

A Third Approach

Perhaps a third approach can be suggested that will explain why Joseph was "above" the "evil eye."

The "evil eye" can be defined more broadly, and on several levels.

One the most basic level it refers to one who sees the negative in everyone and everything. That view has the capacity to help those negative traits to become more pronounced resulting in that individual's loss of whatever blessings he or she did actually deserve.

On a slightly more refined level the "evil eye" can refer to one who has a pessimistic view of things. Translated into interpersonal relationships it means that you will not give the other person the benefit of the doubt when their behavior is called into question. It is not necessarily due to your malevolent nature, but rather because of your pessimistic outlook on life that has been nurtured by so much negativity in our world that we have experienced over time. Ultimately that person will be shunned by you and others with whom you share that negative view.

On a more sophisticated level the "evil eye" refers to one who cannot see the entire picture because they are not privy to the future when things that appear negative today turn out quite differently in the future.

The difference in these three forms of the "evil eye" is that the first two forms are a reflection of the viewer's negative personality or/and their jaundiced view of life. However, the third form is not a reflection of any flaw in the vision of the viewer. Rather it is a constraint placed upon us by G-d who created us with the inability to see the future. And as a general rule we are locked into the present.

Names of Redemption

The Midrash tells us that the names of all of the twelve sons of Jacob allude to the process of redemption. However, of all the twelve sons of Jacob only Joseph's name refers to the future redemption. In other words, Joseph was singled out among all of his brothers to have an eye for the future. Joseph transcends the constraints of time. He was liberated from the shackles of living in the present and past.

Joseph, therefore, represents the ability to see into the future and see how that which appears to be negative is actually transformed into the positive. Joseph's vision was not tainted in the slightest, so Joseph did not have even the most subtle form of the "evil eye" that is an integral part of human nature.

Now, since Joseph did not see things in a negative light, he was therefore impervious to other people's "evil eye" as well. Only those who are negative will suffer from other's

negativity directed towards them. When a person is thoroughly positive they will deflect all the negative energy in their environment.

Of course, this does not mean that optimistic people cannot be harmed. Joseph is a perfect refutation of this notion. He was thrown into a pit, sold into slavery, and tossed into prison. What optimism **does** help is to deflect the negative energy—not negative actions—generated by negative people. It also provides the person with faith and hope with the ability to cope with the adversity they are suffering.

In truth, just as every Jew identifies with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so too every Jew identifies with and possesses the characteristics of Joseph. Indeed, Joseph can be found among the names that the Jewish people have been given in the Torah—together with: Israel, Yehudi, Ivri, Yeshurun. Although most Jews are not biological descendants from the tribe of Joseph we are called Joseph because he was the one who sustained us and guaranteed our survival. We owe our very existence to him.

But more significantly, contrary to what we may have imagined, the Jewish people are the most forward looking nation, whose survival in exile is due to their uncanny combination of pragmatism and optimism. Our ability to see into the future and see how everything will be positive

contrary to the natural tendency to see doom and gloom, is our inheritance from Joseph.

There is no area where this Joseph phenomenon is more pronounced than in our unyielding faith in the coming of Moshiach. For close to two thousand years we prayed daily for the return to Zion. At no time in our history as a people did Jews lose faith in the future reversal of the pain and suffering that was our daily fare. Nowhere is this faith expressed more poignantly than in the famous Ani Ma'amin declaration recited daily by countless Jews and was on the lips of many a Jew on his way to the gas chambers: "I believe with perfect faith in the coming of Moshiach, and even though he tarries, I will await his coming every day!" This gift we received from Joseph.

Today, the Tenth day of the Hebrew month of Tevet, is a fast day commemorating the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonian tyrant Nebuchadnezzar that led to the destruction of the first Temple. On the surface, this is a sad day. But we are promised in the Torah that in the future this day will be transformed into days of rejoicing. Even as we mourn the destruction of the past and empathize with the suffering of the present, we do not lose our faith in the future. This gift we received from Joseph.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

YOU HAVE REACHED YOUR DESTINATION

Chassidic sources, based on the teachings of the Zohar, there is some indication that Moshiach ben Yoseph and Moshiach ben Dovid may actually be one and the same person.

The different titles he is given represent different phases in the process of the Redemption.

The Moshiach ben Yoseph phase is the one that involves Moshiach's need to fight the battles, spiritual and perhaps even physical, to remove the impediments to the building of the Holy Temple.

Moshiach ben Dovid is the appellation given to Moshiach in his role as the builder of the Temple and the one who will usher in an age of permanent goodness, peace, and heightened awareness of G-d.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

YOU HAVE REACHED YOUR DESTINATION

Jacob's Request and "Defense"

Jacob is getting ready to depart from this world and summons his son Joseph to his bedside. Jacob makes a request of Joseph to bury him with his parents and grandparents in his ancestral burial plot in the Cave of Machpelah in the Land of Canaan.

A while later, Joseph was told that his father was ill, and he came with his two sons Menasheh and Ephraim to Jacob who then blessed them and made them equal to Jacob's sons. As a result of this blessing they would be counted as two separate tribes.

The Torah then follows this part of the narrative with Jacob's recounting the passing and burial of Rachel, "When I was coming from Padan Rachel died on me, while traveling through the land of Canaan, when there was still a stretch of land to reach Efras, and I buried her on the way to Efras, in Beis Lechem."

According to Rashi, Jacob was providing a "defense" of his burial of Rachel, Joseph's mother, while still on the road and not in the Cave of Machpelah where he had buried his wife Leah and where the other Patriarchs and Matriarchs were buried.

As Rashi explains, Jacob was concerned that Joseph might harbor some ill feelings towards him for asking to be buried in the Cave of Machpelah, which he did not do for his wife Rachel. Jacob therefore intimated to Joseph that it was not intended as a slight to Rachel; rather it was Divinely ordained that she be buried on the road so that in the future when the Jews were exiled by the Babylonians they would stop at her gravesite to pray for their return and that G-d had promised her that her "children will be returned to their boundary."

Commentators raise the question about why Jacob did not mention this matter before when he made the original request of Joseph to bury him in Canaan. And what connection is there between Jacob's promotion of Ephraim and Menasheh to the status of Tribes with his need to allay Joseph's misgiving about his father's request to be buried in Canaan?

The simple answer is that Jacob did not suspect that Joseph would, G-d forbid, harbor any negative feelings against him for not burying his mother in the Cave of Machpelah. In

Joseph's mind, it was a sign that although Rachel was initially Jacob's preferred wife, Leah ultimately inherited that position after Leah bore him six of the twelve tribes. Her preeminent role in establishing a Jewish nation conferred to her a status superior to that of Rachel. And since there was room for only one wife to be buried in the Cave of Machpelah, he had no choice but to bury Rachel on the road.

However, now that Jacob had indicated that Joseph's children were to be promoted to a position that equaled Reuvein and Shimon, the two eldest sons of Jacob and Leah, it served a sign that, on the contrary, Rachel was still the preferred wife of Jacob. Joseph would thus have been justified in wondering why Rachel was not treated as a Matriarch to be buried in the Cave of Machpelah with the other Matriarchs. Why was that place reserved for Leah who died much later?

Jacob, anticipating Joseph's question, addressed this issue precisely at this time when he indicated that Joseph actually occupied a higher position than that of the other tribes and that Rachel's burial on the road was not a sign of her inferior position.

The Two Kingdoms

One can understand that Joseph's concern about where his mother Rachel was buried on another level.

Joseph knew that the Jewish people were to go through two phases; a temporary phase of exile and a permanent phase of peace and Redemption. These two phases are represented by the division of the Jewish nation into two: Joseph's descendants were to occupy positions of leadership in their own portion of the Land of Israel. Jeroboam, the first king of the breakaway kingdom of Israel was a descendent of Ephraim. He and his successors—until their exile at the hands of the Assyrians—would rival the kings from the tribe of Judah, the dominant son of Leah.

What was the most salient difference between these two Kingdoms?

Rambam explains that although the *Malchei Yisrael*, the Kings of Israel, as they were called, were divinely ordained to be kings, nevertheless their power and dominion was intended, by G-d's design, to be only of a temporary nature. Kingship was given to them provisionally whereas the Davidic dynasty that descended from Judah, was to remain forever.

Another manifestation of this difference can be seen in the two leaders who will be responsible for the future Redemption: The Talmud (Sukkah 52b) tells us that there

are two Moshiach's: Moshiach ben Yoseph, the descendent of Joseph, and Moshiach ben Dovid, the descendent of David. The role of Moshiach from the tribe of Joseph is to pave the way for the ultimate Moshiach. One of his responsibilities according to Midrashic sources is to wage war against the enemies of Israel. According to some sources he will be killed in this war. Thus his role is of a temporary nature. Indeed, according to Rabbi Saadia Gaon the very appearance of Moshiach ben Yoseph is tentative. There might not be a need for his coming if the Jewish people are already sufficiently prepared for Moshiach ben Dovid.

In Chassidic sources based on the teachings of the Zohar there is some indication that Moshiach ben Yoseph and Moshiach ben Dovid may actually be one and the same person. The different titles he is given represent different phases in the process of the Redemption. The Moshiach ben Yoseph phase is the one that involves Moshiach's need to fight the battles, spiritual and perhaps even physical, to remove the impediments to the building of the Holy Temple. Moshiach ben Dovid is the appellation given to Moshiach in his role as the builder of the Temple and the one who will usher in an age of permanent goodness, peace, and heightened awareness of G-d.

In short, the kings that have arisen from Joseph will be intended to play a provisional and tentative role, while the

leaders from Judah and King David will be intended to be the ultimate and permanent leaders of the Jewish people. The former is the leader and inspiration for the journey; the latter is the one who greets us at the gates of our destination and ushers us in.

Thus Joseph's knowledge that his mother Rachel was buried on the road did not initially disturb him. He realized that Rachel's, and thus Joseph's own role, was an "on the road" role, and intended to keep us going even when we were/are in a holding pattern. Rachel was the Matriarch who would beseech the Al-mighty when the Jews would be on their way out of Israel into the Babylonian exile. Rachel epitomizes the loving mother who cares for her children particularly when they are not in their home and are in distress. Rachel is the mother of the Jewish nation in their state of temporary displacement as they wander through the highways and byways of exile.

Joseph Baffled

However after Jacob had made it clear that Joseph would enjoy the status of the first born in that he would receive a double portion of the Land of Israel by making his two sons Ephraim and Menasheh equal to the tribes of Reuvein and Shimon, Joseph was baffled. If his role was to be as permanent and solid as his brothers, the sons of Leah, why

then was his mother Rachel relegated to the "on the road" resting place?

The answer is that, in truth, nothing changed in terms of Rachel's and Joseph's role. They were the ones whose function it was to pave the way for the coming of Moshiach and of the ultimate Redemption. And indeed, in terms of preserving us in exile and preparing us for the future Redemption, most of the credit goes to Rachel and Joseph. However, when it comes to the actual process of Redemption it is Judah and his descendant Moshiach who plays the more prominent role.

And while it was true that Joseph's sons would be equal to Reuvein and Shimon, they were not equal to the tribe of Judah, whose descendants would include King David and the Moshiach ben Dovid.

Jacob therefore wanted Joseph to know that his role, and that of Rachel, would be to empower us to make the journey in and out of exile, but that ultimately this journey will come to an end at which time the Moshiach who descends from David and from Leah will assume the permanent leadership role.

The Journey has an End

The message to us is that as long as we are in exile we need to derive inspiration and empowerment to persevere and even thrive from the Joseph model of leadership. However, we must also realize that the journey does have an end. In the distant past we had to place greater emphasis on the journey itself. As we get closer to the end the focus has to gradually turn from the journey to the destination. How much more so, in the present day and age—the one that the Rebbe has designated as the "last generation of exile and the first generation of Redemption," and particularly after the Rebbe's declaration that "the time of your Redemption has arrived"—our focus has to turn from the Rachel-Joseph "on the road" dynamic to the "we have arrived" and the "now it is time for us to greet Moshiach" mindset and approach to life.

To be sure, nothing has changed in terms of our observance of the Torah and its commandments. The difference lies in the focus. Whereas in the past we were supposed to concentrate on getting closer to our destination by virtue of our Mitzvah observance, now the objective is to study Torah and perform the Mitzvos as a way of greeting and welcoming Moshiach and the Redemption into our midst.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

SWORDS AND BOWS

Of all the requests that a Jew makes in his daily prayers — specifically, in the Amidah, or the Shemoneh Esrei as it is also known — the most significant one is the request for Moshiach and Redemption.

This is true not only because Redemption is the most important request, but also because all our other requests are contained within it.

When Moshiach takes us out of exile and ushers in the Redemption illness, famine, poverty and all the other ills of society, particularly war and bloodshed, will cease.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN
SWORDS AND BOWS

Onkeles' Figurative Translation

Before Jacob passed away, he blessed his son Joseph. Among other blessings he stated:

> "I have given you one portion more than your brothers, Shechem, which I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow."

The Aramaic translator of the Torah, Onkeles, translated two of the Hebrew words used here in a rather novel way. Instead of a literal translation he turned the words charbi – "my sword" - into tzlosi – "my prayer" - and kashti – "my bow" - into b'usi – "my petitions." The same translation can also be found in the Talmud (Bava Basra 123b).

Unlike the Talmud which frequently focuses on the subtle nuances of the text, Onkeles generally remained faithful to its simple meaning. Yet, here he deemed it necessary to deviate from that approach and interpret the two words

for weapons allegorically as a reference to two forms of prayer.

What most likely prompted Onkoles to translate Jacob's blessing in this way is the fact that we cannot find any reference in the Torah to Jacob fighting in a physical battle over the city of Shechem. His sons Shimon and Levi destroyed the city unaided when they learned Dinah had been violated by the son of the city's mayor with the complicity of the entire community.

Nowhere does our parsha mention Jacob's role in that battle. On the contrary, Jacob was rather troubled by his sons' rash and violent behavior and criticized them for it.

Many years before, when Jacob, disguised as Esau, appeared before his father to receive the blessings, Isaac said: "The voice is the voice of Jacob and the hands are the hands of Esau." Our Sages understood this to mean that Jacob personified the ideal of spoken prayer, while Esau embodied physical violence. How then can we understand Jacob's claim that he had conquered Shechem with his sword and bow?

Onkeles must have concluded that Jacob was using these terms figuratively, while actually referring to prayer.

There is still a need to understand how the sword and bow relate to prayer and why Jacob referred to his prayers using two figures of speech: "my prayer" and "my petition." Isn't

every prayer a petition to G-d and every petition to G-d a prayer?

Maharsha, one of the leading commentators of the Talmud, explains that the term "sword" is used in the Torah in reference to Esau, whereas the "bow" is mentioned as Yishmael's instrument of choice. Jacob's two forms of prayer correspond to the two violent modes of Esau and Yishmael.

How are we to understand these two "weapons" and their connection to Esau and Yishmael?

Doing Battle

Prayer, according to the Zohar, is a time of battle. We spend our entire lives surrounded by influences unreceptive to G-d and spirituality. While Torah study and Mitzvah observance fortify us against these threats to our spiritual life, it is prayer specifically that brings us to the battlefield where we tackle those negative influences head on.

When Jacob dreams of the ladder, our Zohar Sages interpret it as the ladder of prayer. The Midrash states that it had four rungs, which correspond with the four tyrannical empires that subjugated the Jewish people. These two explanations complement one another. Prayer is the

means by which we combat the negative forces represented by these nations.

The Bully and the Seducer

One of the obstacles we encounter is our internal Esau, which is characterized by anger, hostility, violence, bullying, brute force, obsession with power and destructive tendencies. Esau personified the Divine trait of gevurah, which translates as "power" or "toughness." And while his father Isaac used this trait in a positive way by being harsh on evil and demanding of himself, Esau allowed this inherited trait of gevurah to degenerate into an evil and destructive power.

Yishmael was a son of Abraham, the paragon of kindness and love. When the Divine trait of love gets out of hand — as it did for Yishmael — it can lead to excessive indulgence in the material and sensual aspects of life. Satisfying every desire and whim might be less destructive in the short run than the destructive evil of Esau, but in the long run it can cause a society to crumble and even disappear. The evil associated with our internal Yishmael is more subtle and insidious.

To combat the internal Esau effectively, one must use a sword. A sword is a close-range weapon that deals with an adversary standing in close proximity. It cannot be

employed to reach a distant and subtle enemy. For that distant adversary one needs a bow and an arrow which can fly long distances and strike a more elusive target.

Hence, the "sword" to which Jacob refered is better understood as the aspect of prayer that he used to combat the more blatant and conspicuous form of evil — the Esau form — whereas his "bow and arrow" referred to the petition component of prayer he wielded to combat the more elusive and subtle form of evil — the Yishmael form.

The Final Challenge

The Midrashic work Pirkei D'R'Eliezer states that Moshiach will follow the Kingdom of Yishmael. This statement implies that the Kingdom of Yishmael will be the final "empire" and challenge for the Jewish people.

For thousands of years the Jewish people have been subjected to the worst forms of tyranny and oppression – the inner Esau – culminating with the Holocaust and the spread of Communism in the last century. The primary challenge we have today comes from our over indulgence in the material world – representing the inner Yishmael. The temptations, enticements and powerful allure of the secular world have wreaked havoc on the moral and spiritual fiber of the Jewish nation, just as they have done to society in general. No matter how insular we might

think our community is, we are not impervious to the outside world's insidious influences. This is indeed the formidable last challenge we must face before the ultimate Redemption.

For that struggle, we need not only the "sword" aspect of prayer but also the "bow and arrow" of petition that can reach the most insidious influences.

The Ultimate Request

The word used for prayer that is related to the "bow" is b'usi, which means "petitions, or requests." Of all the requests that a Jew makes in his daily prayers — specifically, in the Amidah, or the Shemoneh Esrei as it is also known — the most significant one is the request for Moshiach and Redemption. This is true not only because Redemption is the most important request, but also because all our other requests are contained within it. When Moshiach takes us out of exile and ushers in the Redemption illness, famine, poverty and all the other ills of society, particularly war and bloodshed, will cease.

So when Jacob said he took Shechem with his "bow" – "petition" – he was intimating, prophetically, that our prayers should revolve around the request for Moshiach and Redemption. At the time of their coming, we will triumph over all our internal adversaries, including

Yishmael, the most insidious and arguably the most difficult to vanquish.

To be sure, we still need to use the spiritual equivalent of the "sword" to strike against all of the overt forms of external and internal violence. In our current time, we are still witnessing the "marriage" of Esau with Yishmael — i.e., the inclusion of violence and bloodshed within Yishmael's distorted aspect of "love." This unholy merger was foreshadowed by the Biblical story of how Esau married into the family of Yishmael, thus impregnating Esau's violence with Yishmael's lust and vice versa. Recent tragic events in our own country starkly remind us that we continue to have a serious problem with violence as symbolized by Esau. We still need to wield the "sword" aspect of prayer to combat this more flagrant form of evil.

The most potent threat to the survival of our country - and its wellbeing - is still the decay of moral values symbolized by Yishmael. The "bow and arrow" component of prayer is indispensable in confronting that threat and should receive even greater emphasis. The intensity of our heartfelt pleas to G-d, contained in the words "ad masai" ("how much longer?") — which have reverberated through the ages — must be increased. It is not that G-d doesn't hear the faint and muffled sounds of our cries. The problem is that **we** do not hear our own voices and thus may appear to be saying these words perfunctorily. We must therefore shake the

rafters with our cry and shout out to G-d: "We can't tolerate golus - exile - in any form or shape; whether it be Esau's or Yishmael's. Bring us Moshiach now

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

WHERE'S THE BLESSING?

"Water," in general, and the "sea" in particular are metaphors for Torah.

More specifically, the Messianic Age is characterized as an age in which Divine knowledge will deluge the world. In the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the seabed is covered with water."

Indeed, Maimonides concludes his magnum opus, the Mishneh Torah, with this verse, as he describes the Messianic Age as an age of utopia.

It will be washed clean of all vices and pain because it will be flooded with Divine knowledge, Maimonides explains.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

WHERE'S THE BLESSING?

The Best of Both Worlds

Before his passing, Jacob gathered his 12 sons and blessed them. To his son Zevulun he says: "Zevulun will live by the sea coast. He will be at the ship's port. The end of his territory will be at Tzidon."

The question has been asked, in what way is this a blessing? What difference does it make if the Zevulunites will live by the sea shore or elsewhere?

Rashi seems to have anticipated this question and explains that living by the sea enabled this tribe to become seafarers, dealing with import and export commerce. This, in turn, allowed them to support their Yisacharite brethren, who engaged in the study of Torah.

Based on this approach, the Talmud considered Zevulun to be an equal partner with Yisachar in the study of Torah. One who supports the students of Torah receives half of the credit for their Torah study. Indeed, the two tribes of

Yisachar and Zevulun to this day are used as symbols for the students of Torah and their supporters, respectively.

The Rebbe underscored the importance of the supporters of Torah in his statement that the Zevulunites have an even greater role than the Torah scholars in carrying out the Divine plan of making this world a dwelling place for G-d. They, the Zevulunites, elevate the worldly affairs in which they are engaged by using their resources for positive and holy endeavors. The Yisacharites, by contrast, are immersed in Torah study which is divorced from and beyond the material existence. Yisacharites live in the heavens and Zevulunites dwell here on Earth.

In addition, by channeling their resources into the coffers of Torah students and Torah educational institutions the Zevulunites also acquire a share of the Torah's celestial "credits." They, thus, have the best of both worlds; they benefit from engaging and elevating the world through their Mitzvos, even as they enjoy the benefits of Torah that transcends the world.

The question, however, remains, why did Jacob not mention explicitly that the tribe of Zevulun would use their business dealings for the support of their brethren's Torah study? Why did he mention the secondary aspect of living by the sea and omit the main point that they were supporters of Torah?

Do you See the Sea?

One way of answering this question is to reflect on the metaphoric sense of the word "sea." "Water," in general, and the "sea" in particular are metaphors for Torah. More specifically, the Messianic Age is characterized as an age in which Divine knowledge will deluge the world. In the words of the prophet Isaiah: "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of G-d as the seabed is covered with water." Indeed, Maimonides concludes his magnum opus, the Mishneh Torah, with this verse, as he describes the Messianic Age as an age of utopia. It will be washed clean of all vices and pain because it will be flooded with Divine knowledge, Maimonides explains.

Where is Your Heart?

We can now understand why Jacob's blessing simply refers to Zevulun's role as a sea merchant without mentioning his role as the supporter of Yisachar's Torah learning. And herein lies one of the paradoxes of Judaism. Although Zevulun's role is a preeminent role as compared to Yisachar, nevertheless Zevulun's heart is with his brother Yisachar and his preoccupation with Torah study. Zevulun cannot be complacent with his role; he must always yearn for the lofty perch of Yisachar.

In practical terms this means that not only does Zevulun dedicate every free moment for Torah study, he also yearns for the time when he will be able to devote all of his time to Torah study, the way the Yisacharites do. A true Zevulunite experiences a kosher form of envy; he envies the Yisacharites' immersion in the sea of Torah and does everything in his power to emulate him even as he is involved in his business pursuits and thereby creating a dwelling place for G-d.

If the Torah only had emphasized that Zevulun will be a supporter of Torah it would not have conveyed and captured the essence of this blessing. Rather, the blessing he received is that he will never lose sight of his essential goal, without compromising his own mission as Zevulunite. While fully appreciating the challenge and opportunity he has to make this world a dwelling place for G-d and enable others to learn, he knows deep down that his place is truly at sea; the sea of Torah knowledge in general, and the sea of Divine knowledge to be revealed in the Messianic age.

This deeper meaning is alluded to in the continuation of the blessing: "He will be at the ship's port." Zevulun will always be looking out at the sea of Torah, waiting to take his ship and traverse that holy sea.

Waiting to Traverse the See

There is a yet another message conveyed in Zevulun's blessing. The word used for ship here is *aniyah.* The root of this word implies sorrow and lamentation. This is a description of exile conditions. Zevulun is always to be found at the port, ready to take the sorrow of Galus into the sea. The greatest blessing we can receive in our own lives today is to know where we are and not be delusional about our status. We must recognize that we are still in exile, yes, but couple that knowledge with eager anticipation that exile will end imminently. No matter how much we have to contend against Galus conditions, engage the world the way it is now and labor to transform our environments into extensions of the Holy Land, we must always be ready to steer our ship into the sea of Divine knowledge.

The End

The Torah continues: "The end of his territory will be at Tzidon."

The word Tzidon is cognate to the word *tzyayid*, which means to hunt for food. In Chassidic literature, a parallel is brought from the way the Torah describes Eisav as one who hunted and fed his father Isaac. The Tzemach Tzedek explains that there is a parallel between Eisav and Zevulun;.

In Yitzchak's mind, Eisav was the enterprising individual who would use his talents to provide for the sustenance of the Torah scholars, much like Zevulun would in the future. Yitzchak therefore felt that Eisav deserved his blessings because the Zevuluns of the world are needed to transform the world into a dwelling place for G-d.

We may suggest that the reason Eisav failed in his true task was due to his lack of appreciation for the Yisachar ideal represented by his brother Jacob. While Eisav may have initially appreciated the need to engage the world and even refine it, he shows us that without yearning for the sea of Torah the Zevulun role can degenerate into materialism.

As great as Zevulun is in paving the way for the future Redemption, we must realize that it is but a means to an end; the end of exile and our immersion in the Divine sea of knowledge of the Messianic Era.

Thus Jacob's blessing to Zevulun concludes with the words "The end [more literally: the side or secondary aspect] of his territory will be at Tzidon." This means that Tzidon - hunting for material goods, even for the loftiest of reasons - is but the least significant part of Zevulun's mission.

We are Ready!

More specifically, Kabbalah and Chassidus teach us that the description of Eisav as a hunter who provided his father with food is also a metaphor for the sparks of holiness that are embedded in all physical material. When we engage the world in accordance with G-d's plan and vision, we extract and liberate those powerful sparks of holiness. According to the Kabbalists, when the process of releasing these sparks is completed we are ready to greet Moshiach as he ushers in the final Redemption.

Thus the conclusion of the verse, "The end of his territory will be at Tzidon," can also be interpreted another way: that Tzidon stands for the process of releasing the captured sparks. When this process comes to an end, it is time for us to commence our journey into the sea. The Rebbe revealed to us that we have, in fact, concluded that mystical process of refining the sparks. All that is left for us to do today is to greet Moshiach and welcome him into our lives by living in accordance with the Messianic ideals of total devotion to the Mitzvos and particularly the intensive study of Torah.

ESSAY NINETEEN

MIRACLES AND NATURE

The fact that we survived our difficult exile can be attributed to two causes: miraculous or natural.

It was a miracle that "one lamb surrounded by seventy wolves" survived, as the Midrash puts it.

There is also a "natural" explanation for this phenomenon.

The dedication of the Jewish people to the study of Torah and the observance of the Mitzvos despite all of the challenges that confronted us actually served to fortify us in many ways so that the "snakes and the scorpions" were "naturally" repelled by us.

The Jew, who behaves as a Jew ultimately commands the respect of his or her otherwise hostile environment.

ESSAY NINETEEN
MIRACLES AND NATURE

Joseph Brothers' Fear

After Jacob's burial, the Torah in this week's parsha relates:

> "Joseph's brothers saw that their father died, and they said, 'perhaps Joseph will bear a grudge against us and will repay us for all of the evil we have caused him.'"

Why were the brothers so concerned now that Joseph was going to take revenge from them? Joseph treated them so magnanimously for so many years – seventeen years to be precise – until Jacob's death, why would he suddenly have a drastic change of heart?

Rashi explains that when Jacob was alive he invited them to eat at his table and treated them with warmth, in his father's honor. However, now that his father was gone he no longer acted close to them.

And this is how Rashi explains what the Torah means when it says that "The brothers of Joseph saw that their father

died." They saw how the passing of their father changed Joseph's attitude towards them. And therefore they feared that Joseph was contemplating taking revenge and plotting to punish them for what they did to him.

Joseph, of course, had no such intention and clearly harbored no grudge against them as he told them.

Why did He Change His Attitude

The question arises then, why did Joseph change his attitude towards them? Why didn't he invite them to his table as he did in his father's lifetime?

One answer is that Joseph as a king could not routinely dine with people who were not of royal stock. Not only was this the way of ancient monarchs, but even Jewish law, which the Patriarchs and even Joseph anticipated and followed wherever possible, mandates that a monarch not behave in a manner that decreases his honor.

Hence to invite his brothers to every meal would not have been consistent with the rules that a king has no right to forgo his honor. However, when Jacob was alive, Joseph had an obligation to honor his father by inviting him and his other children to his table. Since he was honoring his father it was not an affront to his role as a king, since a king is also obliged to honor his parents.

Passed the Pit

Ba'al Haturim cites a Midrashic explanation as to why the brothers thought that Joseph would try to exact revenge from them. On the way back from the burial of Jacob in the Land of Israel, they passed the pit that Joseph was thrown into before they sold him into slavery in Egypt. Joseph stopped there and recited the blessing thanking G-d for the miracle He wrought for him in this place. When the brothers realized he still had a vivid recollection of the events of the past, they were concerned that Joseph still harbored a grudge against them as well.

This explanation begs for further clarification. Why would Joseph expressing gratitude to G-d for having spared him from the danger he faced when he was thrown into a pit infested with snakes and scorpions mean that he hated his brothers?

Righteous People will not be Harmed by Snakes and Scorpions

One answer to this question lies in a better understanding of Rueben's motive when he tried to save Joseph by suggesting that he be thrown into a pit that just happened to be infested with deadly snakes and scorpions. If he intended this to save him from the hands of his brothers who were plotting to kill him, commentators ask, how did

Rueben intend to save Joseph's life by throwing him into a pit infested with deadly creatures?

One of the answers is that Rueben was convinced that Joseph was a righteous person who would never be harmed by an animal. Consistent with G-d's statement to Noah after the flood, "Your fear shall be upon all the beasts of the field," a human being who acts as he or she should would be impervious to attack from G-d's creatures. This explains how Daniel was not harmed by the hungry lions when he was thrown into their den. It is not a miracle that he was not harmed by the lions; it was a natural consequence of Daniel appearing to them as a creature upon whom the "image of G-d" was imprinted.

Thus, Rueben reasoned, the righteous Joseph would have been secure in the company of the snakes and scorpions. Only humans who are endowed with free choice can harm another person even if he or she is pure and righteous. Hence Rueben felt that Joseph was safer in the pit with snakes and scorpions than in the hands of his brothers. Joseph's survival in the pit was thus not a miracle at all, but a natural result of his righteousness and G-dly bearing.

When the brothers saw that Joseph recited a blessing thanking G-d for the miracle He wrought for him, they realized that Joseph may have been saved miraculously and not because of his righteousness. When this realization

dawned upon them they began to fear that Joseph still harbored a grudge against them; that he was not as pure and innocent as it appeared when their father was still alive.

Until that point, Joseph's brothers thought that he was so righteous that he had totally expunged every trace of enmity from his heart. However, now that they saw how he acknowledged that it was only a miracle that saved him from the pit, not his inherent righteousness and pure soul; they began to think that Joseph may still want to harm them. And the fact that he had acted so warmly to them previously was his attempt at suppressing his deep rooted animosity toward them out of respect for his father.

Joseph, of course, did not harbor any grudge against them. His heart was pure and had not even a trace of hostility towards them. The fact that he attributed his salvation from the pit as a miracle was due to his humility; he did not want to attribute his salvation to his own righteousness. In truth, it was his righteousness and noble character that saved him from the snakes and scorpions.

Saved from the Desert Infested with Snakes and Scorpions

The desert the Jewish people traversed when they left Egypt on their way to the Promised Land is described in the Torah as a desert infested with snakes and scorpions.

This desert is often seen as a metaphor for the journey the Jewish people had to make through the difficult exile, which was/is fraught with all sorts of threats to our physical and spiritual lives. We are the "Josephs" of history that are hated by others and are "thrown to the wolves."

The fact that we survived can be attributed to two causes; the first miraculous and the second natural. It was a miracle that "one lamb surrounded by seventy wolves" survived, as the Midrash puts it. Yet, there is also a "natural" explanation for this phenomenon. The dedication of the Jewish people to the study of Torah and the observance of the Mitzvos despite all of the challenges that confronted us actually served to fortify us in many ways so that the "snakes and the scorpions" were "naturally" repelled by us. The Jew, who behaves as a Jew ultimately commands the respect of his or her otherwise hostile environment.

Moshiach: Natural or Miracle?

The same can be said of the coming of Moshiach. When we ask ourselves what is the basis for our belief that it will happen, the answer is twofold:

Yes, it will be a miracle that the entire world will be transformed into a world of peace and goodness. However, it is also the most natural consequence of centuries and

millennia of millions of people performing Mitzvos under the most trying of circumstances. The cumulative effect of all of this goodness and G-dly energy will takes its "toll" and leave its mark on the world. The world is now more than ready to change despite all of the evil that surrounds us. And the only question we must ask ourselves and G-d is why did it not happen sooner.

ESSAY TWENTY

SPREAD THE INSPIRATION

Jacob went beyond the platitudinous well-wishing of many a loving parent.

He blessed his sons Shimon and Levi with the ability to transform their energy into a positive force.

Moreover, he gave them the ultimate blessing that they share this heightened energy with all the other tribes.

This indeed is a Messianic trait that we must embrace as a way of hastening and preparing for the coming of Moshiach.

ESSAY TWENTY

SPREAD THE INSPIRATION

Why Berate your own Children?

Prior to Jacob's passing he gathers all of his sons and blesses them. That is, with the exception of Shimon and Levi whom he strongly rebukes for their anger that they vented in the destruction of the city of Shechem and the sale of Joseph.

Jacob says to them:

> "Cursed be their wrath, for it is powerful, and their rage for it is callous. I will separate them amongst Jacob and I will scatter them throughout Israel."

Rashi comments that as a result of these words of rebuke, the tribe of Shimon was destined to become the scribes and teachers of children who would have to travel throughout the land to perform their services. The tribe of Levi would also have to travel to collect the tithes to which they were entitled. Thus the idea of scattering them was a prophecy that came true.

Several questions arise:

(a) Why would Jacob take the opportunity of sharing his last moments in this world to berate his own children?

(b) Why couldn't Jacob find at least one blessing for these two sons? Why did he single then out for criticism while he gave unqualified blessings to all of his other children?

(c) What purpose was served by these two tribes having to travel?

It seems that the reason he scattered them was to reduce their power, so that they could not act up and unleash their anger and aggression on the other.

But, on the other hand, one could argue, wouldn't scattering them make their influence more pervasive. And, if Jacob was fearful of their ability to instigate violence, as they had done in the past, keeping them apart from the rest of the community would have been a better solution to the problem.

(d) Jacob's final blessings to his sons are prefaced in the Torah with the statement:

> "Gather round and I will tell you what will happen to you at the End of Days."

In other words, the blessings he gave his children were in some way connected to the Messianic Era. This raises the obvious question: What is so Messianic about the way he "blessed" Shimon and Levi? Is the Messianic Age a time

when a father singles out two of his children for condemnation?

The Ultimate Blessing for CHildren

The answer to all these questions is to realize that the ultimate blessing one can give a child is for them to be able to take the energy that animates their worst vices and recalcitrant behavior into a positive force.

When we see a child that is rebellious, for example, there are two approaches we can take. The first is to try to get rid of the rebellious attitudes; to assuage the child's anger, and, in general, to soften the child's temperament. Transforming the child from an aggressive devil into a docile and sweet angel is admirable, but it fails to recognize the fact that G-d created the aggressive mindset and it might have some constructive value. And if it is part of G-d's creation, one should try to salvage and utilize it for the good.

The second and preferred approach to the aggressive child—or any other negative behavioral pattern—is to harness that aggressive spirit into doing good.

And that was precisely Jacob's intent when he rebuked Shimon and Levi. Instead of superficially wishing them well and blessing them with peace and humility, he blessed

them with the ability to aggressively spread their moral indignation and enhanced sensitivity, to all of the Jewish people.

To be sure, their anger and aggression had to be transformed into unadulterated dedication to G-dly ideals. But, in Jacob's mind, it was imperative that they do not slow down. Moreover, Jacob wanted them to be the ones to be in the position to influence others. So while all the other less aggressive tribes were restricted to their territories and vocations, the twin tribes of Shimon and Levi were destined to earn their living by traveling throughout the land, teaching, inspiring and affecting all of the Jewish people.

Even the members of the tribe of Levi, whose travels was intended for material purposes— collecting their tithes — would, nevertheless, be in the position to utilize their contacts with others to impart their knowledge and spiritual awareness to those who would give them their tithes. In the words of the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe to his emissary who was sent ostensibly to be a fund-raiser for charity: "Your job is to reap material goods and sow spirituality."

Thus Jacob was giving his two sons Shimon and Levi the ultimate blessing: They should be in the position to totally transform their weakness into strengths by scattering them

throughout the Jewish community so that they can share their dedication with all others.

Beyond Platitudes

Jacob went beyond the platitudinous well-wishing of many a loving parent. He did not just wish them well, but he blessed them with the ability to transform their energy into a positive force. Moreover, he gave them the ultimate blessing that they share this heightened energy with all the other tribes.

This indeed is a Messianic trait that we must embrace as a way of hastening and preparing for the coming of Moshiach. Moshiach is about transforming all of the negative energy of the exile into a positive force and spreading it to the entire world. Each one of us must likewise reveal our own personal Moshiach by using our vices—not only our virtues—for the pursuit of the highest Messianic ideals and spread it to everyone around us.

Don't Knock the Ego

To cite a simple example: There are people who bask in the limelight, always looking for recognition and acclaim. Instead of preaching pure humility and self-effacing characteristics that would render many of these

personalities impotent, we should take their drive underlying their pursuit of honor and recognition as a force to help and inspire others, even as we work on getting rid of the negative aspects of pride and egotism.

If we put all of our energy on tempering our egos and nothing more, we may end up with nothing. We may never succeed in getting rid of our egos, and, in addition, we will also not have the beneficial effect that our ego driven attitudes might have engendered.

After harnessing the energy for good, we must follow that by spreading the positive message to as many people so that the entire world is ready to greet Moshiach.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

SWORDS AND ARROWS

Three times a day, even the most spiritually unskilled person, with minimal preparation and emotion, can accomplish much in procuring from G-d the needs for which we pray.

We should never underestimate the power of our daily prayers, even if they appear routine and perfunctory.

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

SWORDS AND ARROWS

Military or Spiritual?

Jacob in his blessing to his son Joseph and his grandchildren, Menasha and Ephraim, speaks of the additional piece of land in Israel that he acquired and was giving to Joseph. Jacob goes on to describe how he had come to acquire this piece of land; that he had conquered it from the Amorites *b'charbi u'bikashti*—with "my sword and my bow."

Onkeles—the Roman prince who converted to Judaism (first century), and wrote the most authoritative, Divinely inspired, translation of the Torah (in Aramaic)—translates these two words: *b'charbi u'bikashti: "*with my prayers and petitions."

It is interesting that, Onkeles, the former Roman leader—whose nation lived by the sword—saw the spiritual angle of the text, while other commentators of Jewish origin—who live by the mouth, see the militaristic angle of Jacob's exploits.

Obviously, both interpretations are true and valid. Jacob did not shy away from a military confrontation with his enemies. As much as Judaism emphasizes the superiority of the spiritual over the physical, there are times when we must use physical force to defend our lives and interests. Passive resistance is not an option when our survival or security is at stake.

But, in order for the military aspect of our defense to be successful we need the spiritual element of prayer as well. Jacob thus would always couple his military efforts with prayer. Hence the dual interpretation of the words *b'charbi u'bikashti*—a) "my sword and bow;" b) "my prayers and petitions."

Why Swords and Bows?

The question one could ask is why he chose to represent prayer with specifically these two weapons: the sword and the bow and arrow?

Second, what is the difference between a prayer and a petition?

R. Zev Soloveitchik, one of the great Talmudists of the twentieth century, explains that the sword and arrow are two weapons systems that differ fundamentally and therefore represent two distinct forms of prayer.

The sharpened sword can cause serious injury just by having its blade touch its victim. Even without skill and power, one could use a sword against an enemy with devastating results, and even from a close distance. The arrow by contrast is harmless unless it is skillfully shot with a bow by an accomplished archer.

Wo Forms of Prayer

Paralleling these two weapons, prayer likewise comes in two forms: The Shemonah Esrei, the structured prayer that was composed by the prophets of the early second Temple era, is like a sharp sword. Anyone who recites this prayer with minimal skill and preparation has the ability to make a difference.

Thus, three times a day, even the most spiritually unskilled person, with minimal preparation and emotion, can accomplish much in procuring from G-d the needs for which we pray. We should never underestimate the power of our daily prayers, even if they appear routine and perfunctory.

But there is a second type of prayer. It is the prayer of the skilled spiritual archer who knows the highways and byways of the heavens. This is the form of prayer our Talmudic Sages had in mind when they said:

> "Whoever has a sick person in his home should go to the sage of his city and have him ask for Divine mercy."

While every person can and must pray for his or her own needs, there are certain people whose spiritual stature can pierce the most resistant armor. Their spiritual skill and power can find ways to get our requests met when other avenues may be blocked.

The Power of an Ax

There is an alternate way of explaining the second form of prayer.

The Ba'al Shem Tov taught that anyone who prays with sincerity and intense feeling can break down any of the barriers in heaven. And while our daily prayers were designed by their composers to function as keys to open up the locks on the heavenly gates, a heartfelt prayer recited by anyone—but particularly a person who prays from the depths of his heart—can be compared to an ax that can break any lock.

Thus, according to the Ba'al Shem Tov, the two forms of prayer represent the formal prayers that we recite thrice daily and the more personalized and spontaneous prayer that come from the hearts and souls of even the most

simple person who bares his or her soul.

We have many needs for which we pray. But the most pressing need is the need to get out of Galus-exile. Exile is not just a geographic term; it can be defined as a period of chaos, oppression, alienation, confusion, spiritual decline, depression, fragmentation, Divine concealment, and the lack of universal peace and harmony.

This explains why most of our prayers focus on our request and plea to G-d to take us out of exile and bring us Moshiach.

But, it does not suffice for us to rely on our structured and scheduled prayers to accomplish this goal, we must also vent our strongest feelings and heartfelt pleas to G-d at all times for the exile to end and for G-d to bring us Moshiach who will usher in the Messianic Age.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

HASTE DOES NOT (ALWAYS) MAKE WASTE

In these last moments of exile, every Mitzvah carries far more weight than at any other time in our history.

Even one seemingly "insignificant" gesture—consistent with G-d's will conveyed to us through the Torah—can forever alter the nature of existence.

One Mitzvah, the Talmud writes, can transport the entire world from a state of exile to a state of Redemption and permanent peace.

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

HASTE DOES NOT (ALWAYS) MAKE WASTE

Wearing our Talents on our Sleeves,"

When Jacob gathers his sons to bless them we find it curious that he criticized his first three sons, rather than blessing them. In a previous message it was explained that there are certain people whose positive traits are latent. A blessing unleashes the force that allows people to actualize their hidden potential.

But, there are other people who "wear their talents on their sleeves," as it were, and are in no need for a blessing to help them actualize their talents. On the contrary, these individuals are in need of a force, a filter of sorts, which will control the excesses or misdirection of their otherwise positive traits.

Seen in this light, Jacob did not really deprive some of his sons of his blessings; rather he recognized their positive qualities and simply pointed out to them how they were misdirected in the past and how they should be channeled in the future.

The Rebuke of Reuben

With this introduction in mind let us examine the words of rebuke delivered to Jacob's first born son, Reuben:

> "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my strength... unstable as water..."

According to Rashi, Jacob was criticizing Reuben's haste and impetuous temperament.

It is interesting to note that, by contrast, haste has been highlighted by Jacob as a positive and admirable quality of another of his sons, Naphtali:

> "Naphtali is like a gazelle that runs quickly."

This is understood by Rashi and others as recognition of Naphtali's haste.

The obvious question here is why does Jacob find the need to rebuke and thereby correct Reuben's penchant for haste, yet praises Naphtali's seemingly identical trait?

The answer lies in a better understanding of the role of haste and the key to this understanding can be found in the words of our Sages in Ethics of the Fathers that encourage us to "Run like a deer... to do the will of your Father in heaven."

Haste and dispatch, agility and alacrity, are all positive qualities when they are in response to fulfilling G-d's will.

Haste and impulsive behavior has no place if one's course of action is based solely on one's own understanding. Suppose I wake up in the morning thinking that a new approach to helping the community is warranted, it behooves me to subject my original thought to serious scrutiny. Is this truly the right course, or is it the product of a creative mind? Is it genuinely consistent with what the Torah tells me is G-d's will, or is it merely a reflection of my own desire for leaving my mark on society or having society conform to my will?

Charting a new course in the pursuit of positive and noble goals requires serious thought, consultation with others and ultimately being prepared to modify or even discard an original and brilliant idea if it proves to not totally conform to G-d's will. In this arena, there is no room for hasty decisions and impulsive behavior.

Subjective Haste

This hasty approach to doing what we subjectively think of being good was the issue that prompted Jacob to criticize Reuben. Reuben, according to our Sages, based on hints in the Biblical text and oral traditions, after the death of Rachel, removed his father's bed from the tent of Bilha and placed it in the tent of his mother Leah. This was his way

of showing respect for his mother and reversing what he thought was an injustice.

Clearly, he was basing his actions on his subjective feeling as to what was proper and improper, and he was wrong. His haste and zealousness caused him the loss of leadership of his brethren; a position he was originally entitled to as the first born. His haste was not to do G-d's will, but to express his personal feelings of moral outrage at what he perceived was a slight to his mother's honor. It could very well be that after he decided to move the bed he rationalized that it was G-d's will, but his original motivation was his subjective sense of morality.

Objective Haste

On the other hand, when we know clearly that a certain course of action is desirable and is mandated by the Torah, especially when it goes against our personal interests; it behooves us to act forthwith, without any hesitation or delay. "Run to do the will of your Father in heave!" This trait is identified with Naphtali, who, according to Talmudic and Midrashic texts, was always ready to respond to G-d's directives.

The human being is a rational and reflective being, and the human being is an emotional and impulsive creature as well. Both traits are positive if they are used properly. If we

use our power of deliberation to ponder whether we should respond to G-d's directives while our impulsive nature fuels our personal ambition, then we will have squandered and compromised these traits. When we use deliberation for initiatives that spring from our own thoughts, and use haste in carrying out the initiatives of the Torah we will have gone a long way in fulfilling our role as complete human beings.

We are in the Naphtali Age of Positive Haste

We are living in unique times; on the threshold of the Messianic Age. If over intellectualization of Judaism was misguided in the past, there is certainly no time now to be deliberate in our approach to Judaism. Every one of us must become a "Naphtali."

In these last moments of exile, every Mitzvah carries far more weight than at any other time in our history. Even one seemingly "insignificant" gesture—consistent with G-d's will conveyed to us through the Torah—can forever alter the nature of existence. One Mitzvah, the Talmud writes, can transport the entire world from a state of exile to a state of Redemption and permanent peace.

In such a time, the idea of seizing every opportunity to do more good cannot be overstated. While we must be careful not to fall into the "Reuben trap" to act impulsively when

we think of new ideas that might contradict the law and spirit of Halacha (Jewish law), it is imperative that we adopt the "Naphtali" form of opportunism for the good.

Our Sages liken this world to a wedding feast and admonish us to hastily grab some food and eat. They are referring, of course, to the spiritual food and nourishment that nurtures our soul. Their words ring especially true in these last moments of exile. We cannot afford the "luxury" of slowly deliberating on the value of one Mitzvah.

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

DON'T INHIBIT

It is crucial that our diverse talents and competing approaches do not lead to disharmony.

It is imperative that there is a sense that all these different roads roads must lead to one goal: making the world a place where G-d's presence is revealed, which is Judaism's view of the Messianic Age.

To facilitate this unity we must always remember and invoke our common background; we are all descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, either biologically or spiritually.

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

DON'T INHIBIT

No More Wining and Dining; You're On Your Own

Near the end of this week's Parsha, *Vayechi*, the Torah recounts how after Jacob's passing, Joseph's brothers were concerned that Joseph would now try to take revenge for having sold him to Egypt. They therefore came to Joseph and told him:

> "Your father did command before his death, saying, so shall you say to Joseph, O forgive, I pray you, the trespass of your brothers, and their sin; for evil have they done to you. And now we pray you, forgive the trespass of the servants of the G-d of your father."

When Joseph heard how his brothers suspected him of harboring a grudge against them he cried and told them in no uncertain terms that he did not blame them for his suffering.

It is strange that after all the years—seventeen to be precise—that Joseph spent with them from the time he

revealed to them that he—the Viceroy of Egypt was their brother whom they had sold into slavery in Egypt—until the passing of Jacob, they still harbored the fear that Joseph would try to take revenge. Joseph did everything to show his love and affection for them. He supported them and sustained them. Joseph, indeed, demonstrated that he did not even harbor a tinge of animosity towards them. What suddenly changed after Jacob's passing?

Rashi addresses this question and answers that as long as Jacob was alive he would wine and dine with his brothers. After they returned from the burial of Jacob, Joseph ceased to invite his brothers to his table. This, they took as a signal that Joseph's attitude towards them would now change. As long as Jacob was alive, they surmised, Joseph showed them tolerance and feigned love for them to make Jacob feel good about the unity in his family. But now that their father was gone, they feared, Joseph would not hesitate to pay them back for their dastardly deeds of the past.

But Rashi's answer raises a follow up question: Why did Joseph change his custom of inviting them to his table? If indeed Joseph had true love and respect for them why did he distance them by not having them over for dinner as was his previous custom?

The Midrash, that is presumably the source of Rashi's

comment here, provides a simple answer to this question. These are the words freely adapted from the Midrash:

Respect for Father

When Jacob was alive he made sure that when they dined together, Joseph—as king—would sit at the head of the table. Joseph was extremely uncomfortable at the thought that he was sitting above his older brothers. And even though Joseph predicted that his brothers would someday bow down to him, his humility—and perhaps the fear that it would rekindle the old animosity of his brothers towards him—made him feel uncomfortable about that setup. But he had no choice. That was his father's wish. And out of respect for his father he sat at the head of the table.

But now that his father was no longer there he could not get himself to demonstrate that he was superior to his brothers. To avoid the rather embarrassing, awkward and discomfiting situation, as to who should sit at the head of the table, he stopped inviting them.

The Return of the Famine

One could also suggest that Joseph's decision to cease inviting his brothers could be attributed to another very down-to-earth factor. Joseph's primary responsibility was to

sustain Egypt and the neighboring countries that were ravished by the famine. He had no time for wining and dining and for a social life. From the time Jacob came to Egypt until his passing the famine miraculously ceased only to return in its full fury with his passing.

We could now understand why Joseph no longer invited his brothers to join him in his meals as he had done when Jacob was alive. As long as Jacob was alive Joseph did not have to devote himself exclusively to the job of saving Egypt from a devastating famine. He had time for social niceties and would frequently have his family over for a royal dinner. Now that the famine had returned, Joseph could not afford the luxury of spending time with his family.

Twelve Directions

There might be a third and deeper reason for Joseph's change of attitude towards his brothers.

Joseph appreciated that his brothers possessed diverse temperaments and therefore represented different approaches to life. Joseph knew that he and his brothers would form the nucleus of a Jewish nation that would be given the Torah along with the charge to transform the world into a dwelling place for G-d. Joseph also knew that to fulfill that mission there was a need for twelve different

approaches. To erase the differences between people in the name of unity is not good for the people, the world and ultimately it is not good for the cause of unity itself. G-d wants our individual talents to be cultivated to their fullest.

On the other hand, it is crucial that our diverse talents and competing approaches do not lead to disharmony. It is imperative that there is a sense that all these twelve roads must lead to one goal: making the world a place where G-d's presence is revealed, which is Judaism's view of the Messianic Age. To facilitate this unity we must always remember and invoke our common background; we are all descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, either biologically or spiritually.

Thus, as long as Jacob was with them it was important that they all dined together to foster the understanding that they are truly one people. But, Joseph knew that if they would always be together under the very powerful and domineering aura of Joseph it would inhibit the development of their individual talents. He feared that his overarching presence in their lives would smother their individuality and cause them to suffocate or to blend into Joseph's identity and become mere extensions of him.

Joseph therefore decided to let each of them lead his own individual life to cultivate their individuality, hoping that the time they spent together with their father Jacob would

suffice in inculcating the sense that their differences notwithstanding, they were twelve sons of one father Jacob—that they had one common soul and goal.

Multifaceted but United

We are living in momentous times. We are a multifaceted people because each of us possesses a unique way of expressing G-d's infinite light. But it is crucial that we realize two things:

First: Our differences must not lead us to feeling that we are a fragmented and divisive people. We must always realize that we have one origin, one history and one destiny. Unfortunately, crises such as the war in Gaza, help to alert us to the fact that we are one. We must utilize this opportunity to reinforce that oneness.

Second, it is simultaneously important for us to realize that both our differences and our unity must be based on our common objective: to bring Moshiach. This means that our different talents have to be harnessed to the goal of making the world a G-dly world by thinking, speaking and acting in a G-dly way—the path set forth for us in our Torah.

Especially in these times of crises, all of us must resolve to strengthen our observance of Judaism, in a spirit of oneness and unity.